# BEN AFFLECK AS DAREDEVIL!

1st PHOTO & MOVIE SECRETS INSIDE

# WIZARD

## The 100 GREATEST STORIES EVER!

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Wolverine & Emma Frost of New X-Men

## THE FIRST CAPTAIN AMERICA

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THE COMICS MAGAZINE 131

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# WIZARD contents

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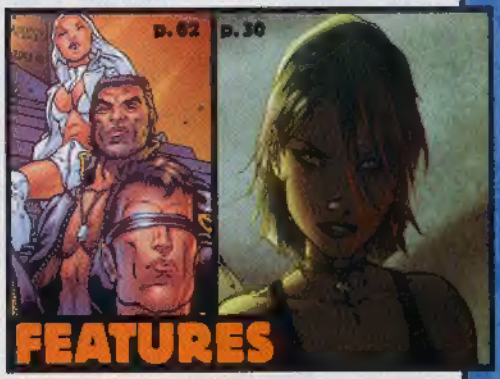


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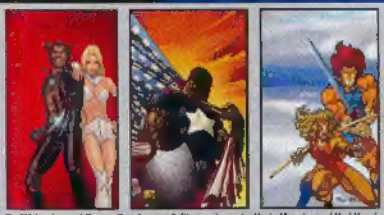
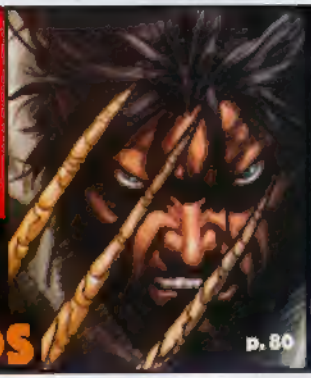


The Wolverine and Emma Frost cover (left) was drawn by Kevin Maguire and Karl Kesel, colored by Hi-Fi Design. You can find them and the rest of their fellow New X-Men on our Top 100 Trade Paperbacks list, beginning on page 62. The Truth cover (middle) was drawn by Marvel Chief Joe Quesada and Danny Miki, colored by Richard Isanove. To read up on Marvel's newest controversial project, turn to page 14. The Lion-O and Cheetara cover (right) was drawn by Ed McGuinness and Jason Martin, with colors added by Chris Walker. Don't bypass our exclusive *ThunderCats* preview on page 36.



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COOL STUFF THROUGH THE MAIL

## EXCLUSIVE OFFER

## AVENGERS #4 ACE

Relive the first Silver Age appearance of Captain America with your very own ACE copy of *Avengers* (vol. 1) #4! This legendary issue also features a brand-new, acetate cover by *Ultimates* artist Bryan Hitch and an introduction written by *Ultimates* writer Mark Millar! And no *Wizard ACE* is complete without an original "Twisted ToyFare Theater" by those wacky boys at *ToyFare*! Show your pride in America and get on over to **page 48** to order your copy today!

# FROM THE TOP

# THE HEAT IS ON

The hits just keep on comin'!

The summer continues to heat up as we follow up last issue's preview of Top Cow's *Battle of the Planets* with an equally magnificent preview of WildStorm's upcoming *ThunderCats* mini-series (**page 38**), beautifully drawn by *Superman* artist Ed McGuinness! It's simply amazing how the '80s have come back in such a big way!

While you're sitting by the pool, learn more about hot Marvel Editor Axel Alonso (**page 90**) and why so many creators in the biz are dying to work with him. Then while you fire up the barbecue check out our feature on the recent samurai/martial-arts surge in comics (**page 56**) and our special report on Marvel's new, controversial project, *The Truth* (**page 14**). And between Frisbee tosses on the beach feast your eyes on a couple of fantastic sketchbooks by the talented crew at Top Cow (**page 30**) and up-and-comer Phil Noto (**page 44**), who's drawing Jimmy Palmiotti's newest title, *Beautiful Killer*.

I know that some of you probably have a summer reading list from school, but you can't miss our big feature on the Top 100 trade paperbacks of all time (**page 62**). You might want to add some of these on there! And for you gamers out there don't miss our report on what went down at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (**page 96**)—you'll be amazed!

On behalf of the staff and myself, thanks to all of you who joined us for our first-ever Wizard World East in Philadelphia. It was a rousing success, so look for an even bigger convention next year in the City of Brotherly Love!

See you back here next month!

Sincerely,

Gareb Shamus

## BY THE NUMBERS

*Statistics compiled in the making of this issue*

| | |
|---|---|
| Approximate number of cheese steaks consumed by staffers over the course of the three-day Wizard World East convention in Philadelphia | 64 |
| Of those, amount eaten by one unnamed (and rightfully embarrassed) staffer | 8 |
| Number of bona-fide celebrities who attended *Wizard's* Neverdenfest II party in May | 2* |
| Amount of telephone numbers co-host and Managing Editor Mel Caylo got at the party | 0 |
| Number of times Assoc. Editor Andy Serwin went "kung-fu" on people while writing the samurai comics feature (see p. 56) | 9 |
| Number of staff members who have read every trade paperback on our Top 100 list | 6 |
| Number of trade paperbacks on our Top 100 list we recommend you read if you want a job here | 100 |
| Age of the oldest car–a Saturn–in the Wizard parking lot | 8 |
| Number of other Wizard staffers who drive a Saturn | 7** |
| Number of Lovin' Spoonful CDs Associate Editor Jesse Thompson brought in for "Hot Seat" (see p. 168) | 4 |
| Number of times Marvel Editor Axel Alonso said, "Do you follow me?" while being interviewed by Staff Writer Casey Seijas | 46 |
| Total number of comics written by Kevin Smith to date (see checklist on p. 158) | 38 |

* "Jamie Powers" co-star Seth Green and super-artist Jim Lee **One as a cell, Entered We'll do a commercial for us!

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THUNDERCATS COVER

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# MAGIC WORDS

## 'SPIDER-MAN' FAN REVIEW... BALD BAD-ASSES IN BOLIVIA... ...& MARVEL'S WORST MISTAKE!

**Cellulite on the thighs is a problem. Celluloid on the brain? Not a problem.**

**Seems like a lot of youse got movies on your mind. Mail this month was dominated—Yea, verily dominated!—by discussion of the Academy Awards, "Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back," "Daredevil" and even a little thing called...what was that name again? Oh, yeah—"Spider-Man." Check out "Quick Hits" for marry Spidey missives. Check out the rest of the columns for other movie messages. And conspiracy theories. Yeah, gotta have them conspiracy theories...**

**Jim,**

I thoroughly enjoyed *Wizard* #128, but the highlight had to be the "Basic Training" feature with *Magic Pickle* creator Scott Morse. He may be right about fruits and vegetables being the heart of comics, but he never mentioned the dark power behind the throne...RICE!

You see, humans have approximately 30,000 genes, while rice has over 50,000! They are obviously a superior organism, yet we as a comic-buying public have no idea! What is rice's secret plan, and is Mr. Morse involved in the cover-up? Please use your best investigators to discover if the truth does indeed go, "Snap, Crackle...World Domination!"

**Ronnie G. Brown II**
**Bolivia, NC**

**Scott Morse, interestingly enough, could not be reached for comment. Our best undercover investigators, however, placed him at several Chinese restaurants recently, where he was observed completely avoiding eating rice and instead going straight for the hot-and-sour soup. Methinks something is afoot.**

**Tremble before the power of rice! But know that that ain't nuthin' but a thang compared to...the hair conspiracy!**

**Dear Jim,**

Why are there so many bald writers in comics? Mark Waid, Peter David, Jeph Loeb, Grant Morrison, J. Michael Straczynski, Brian Michael Bendis...

But man, those guys are good!

**Reggie Manlungat**
**Parañaque City, Philippines**

**A noticeably feisty *Fuse* writer Mark Waid says, "It's the testosterone, girly-boy. Wanna make something of it?"**

**But after proper plying with bathtub gin and hot-and-sour soup, *Amazing* Spider-writer J. Michael Straczynski caved in and gave up the goods. "Go ahead and say it's testosterone poisoning because we're just that much more MEN than comics writers with more hair," Straczynski says. "It's safer than talking about the secret meeting the six of us attended eight years ago in Bolivia, wherein we made a pact with Satan that in exchange for our lovely locks, we would be given writing powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. All we have to do now is get three more on board in the next two years so that on the 10th anniversary of the Summoning we can return to Bolivia with a full coven of nine,**

# QUICK HITS

THE READERS STRIKE BACK!

**Whoa! In the wake of x IT! flick called "Spider-Man," this month's "Quick Hits" is all Spidey, all the time...**

"I enjoyed the 'Spider-Man' movie, although the CGI was sloppy in parts. And Kirsten Dunst was a wonderful Mary Jane!"

**—Garth McMurray, mcmurray110@yahoo.com**

"'Spider-Man' rules! This is the best comic movie since... I don't know when! An hour in yearlong rain waiting for tickets well spent indeed."

**—Aaron Cameron, Florence, AL**

"I did not think anything could top the first 'Superman' movie, but we have a definite contender in 'Spider-Man.'"

**—Patrick Wait, docwait@cs.com**

"My only complaint about 'Spider-Man' was that it wasn't for kids. My 9-year-old was very [illegible] of the Green Goblin."

**—Paul Friedlander, New Orleans, LA**

"Spidey is indeed 'amazing,' but sadly, Sam Raimi did NOT convince me on that Power Ranger outfit Green Goblin costume. Hiding Willem Dafoe in armor took a lot out of his work."

**—Daniel Soucy, daniel72@videotron.ca**

"I really liked the 'Spider-Man' movie. Willem Dafoe breathed such life into the Green Goblin."

**—Joseph Morton, marsthebringerofwar@hotmail.com**

"Just let Sam Raimi direct every comic book movie adaptation from here on out. Okay?"

**—Carla Benning, Cerritos, CA**

"If 'Spider-Man' is any indication, I'm now insane looking forward to 'Hulk' and 'Daredevil.' Marvel can now make great movies!"

**—Gerald Young, Bessemer, AL**

"It's a shame that they cut Stan Lee's line from the 'Spider-Man' teaser. But that was his face I saw flash on screen for just a second, wasn't it?"

**—Pablo Bautista, Phoenix, AZ**

"It was nice seeing the little comic homages such as the Goblin tossing Spidey away on his glider (just like *Amazing Spider-Man* #40's cover) in 'Spider-Man.'"

**—Bob Green, Lexington, KY**

"The 'Spider-Man' movie was downright... believable somehow. Sure, Spider-powers aren't too likely, but the drama and the romance seemed very real."

**—Lola Phillips, Los Angeles, CA**

"I've not thought the last times... Peter Parker's parents coming back, the still-shameful 'Clone Saga.' But I just saw the 'Spider-Man' movie, and looking back, I have just one thing to say: Spidey's always been the greatest."

**—Ryan Bean, rbean@peace.gordon.edu**

**and shall put our heads together (now you know where that phrase comes from) and via the moonlight reflected from the top of our heads, open a doorway through which the Elder Gods will at last return. Then shall we vanquish the fully-haired upstarts like Neil Gaiman and the rest of the Folliculorum Mallefarius, and we shall rule for a thousand years and there shall be cheerleaders for everyone!"**

**Okay. I hear Bolivia's nice, and I'm gettin' a bit patchy myself. Can I join?**

## Dear Jim,

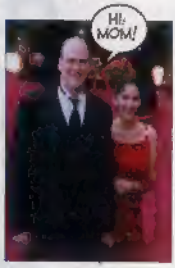
Imagine my shock when I watched the Oscars the other night just to find out that they blatantly snubbed your work in "Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back." I thought for sure you were a shoo-in for Best Supporting Actor.

This is an atrocity, and I strongly believe that true comic fans should boycott the Academy Awards until there is an apology presented to you. I encourage fans to not watch the Oscars next year if this is not resolved. Furthermore, fans should avoid buying any Academy products such as Oscar Meyer brand meat products, toiletries and underoos.

**Alan Myers**
**Lebanon, MO**

**Cbee, thanks for the support. Your sentiments are echoed by no less an august personality than Kevin P. Smith, writer/director of "Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back" and a member of the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences.**

**"Are you kidding me?" Smith exclaims. "Based on this egregious oversight, I'm refusing to attend the Oscars next year. Granted, I've never attended the Oscars anyway. But still...."**




## Dearest Wizard,

Lucky me! I got tickets to sit on the red carpet at the 2002 Academy Awards! And who should be the first "star" I gazed upon? Alex Ross, who did the official poster art for this year's Oscars.

I shouted his name and he posed kindly for the photo here. He cleans up nicely, don't you think?

**Erin Tapken**
**Marion, IA**

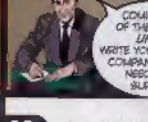
**All the way from Iowa to Hollywood. Is there no distance stalkers won't stalk?**

**Whereas I will agree that Alex cleans up okay—and I really like his tie—my rage remains intact! I don't give a rat's ass if Alex Ross gets front row seats and free popcorn. I still ain't buyin' Oscar Meyer hot dogs.**

## Jimmy,

During the bike-riding "E.T." spoof scene in Kevin's Smith's "Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back," there is a man in red tights rolling around on the ground. This man looks *amazingly* similar to Daredevil, and since Ben Affleck is slated to portray Señor Matt Murdock in the upcoming "Daredevil" film, I suspect that the aforementioned red-tights-boy is supposed to be Daredevil himself. Does this mean that Smith and Affleck knew this way back

# HEY! IT'S PEN PALS...




Do a title? Stalk a character? Just have something to say? Then write your favorite comic company and let 'em know what you're thinking. Send your thoughts to the following addresses, but be sure to send your letters in care of a particular book or editor. Power to the people!

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when "JSBSB" was in production!

**Jon Van Ryn**
**icemage24@aol.com**

**A-yup. And here's a double-secret bonus note that'll win you a free beer or a game of Comic Book Trivial Pursuit some day: If you look *reeeaaal* close (or maybe pause it on DVD), you may see a man wearing a backwards "Daredevil" baseball cap. That's none other than "Daredevil" writer/director Mark Steven Johnson himself. So the real "Daredevil" director was directing the fake "Daredevil" movie! How's *that* for attention to detail?**

### Dear *Wizard*,

Why do villains spend so much time talking and so little time killing? If I was the Green Goblin and I had Spider-Man tied up in a chair, I'd send him into the next world instead of giving him the chance to escape. Why are seemingly all the villains in comics stupid, clumsy fools who don't know when to pull the trigger?

**Joseph Parton**
**Roanoke Rapids, NC**

**Stan "The Man" Lee himself has the answer: "The reason's so obvious I feel foolish explaining it. If the villain killed the hero right away, the story would be over, the series would end, the publication would cease, the artist and writer would be unemployed and it would be the start of a chain reaction leading to a national recession," says Stan, who's always been kinda fond of a paycheck himself. "Shame on you for suggesting that we ruin the American economy!"**

### Hi Jim,

As a comic collector on a budget, I love the idea of 10-cent comics (or nine cents from Marvel). Sure, it's only for the odd comic here and there, but think of the possibilities! It's affordable to buy one copy to put away and have another to read. That's thinking small, though.

Thinking of redecorating? Them 9-cent comics are cheap wallpaper! Do you have a runny nose? Here, have a page out of *Fantastic Four* #60! Mark Waid would've wanted it that way!

Oh, excuse me. I just had a little spill here. I think it's time for another *Batman: The 10-Cent Adventure*. That's a 10-cent adventure in housecleaning, that is.

**Adam St. Onge**
**anexus@sympatico.ca**

**Guess the toilet paper joke is just too easy here, huh?**

**Speaking of budgets...**


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### Slim Jim,

I understand that Marvel Comics owns the rights to the "Ultraverse" characters. Do they have any plans to resurrect such characters as Prime or Nightman? They could fit perfectly in the Marvel Knights or MAX lines.

**Andrew Busse**
**Odessa, TX**

**Hee, hee! Ultraverse...**

**In a word: No.**


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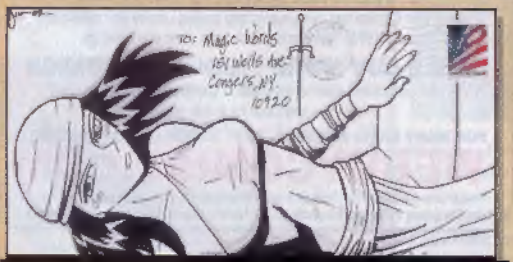
# LETTER ART

The mega-talented creator of this month's best envelope takes home a *JSA: Justice Be Done* trade paperback, courtesy of DC Comics. DC is so cool for donating their stuff to us, we owe them bigger than the older JSA guys own Gerlib! Artists: Please include a clearly printed return address and a list of characters depicted on the back of the envelope.

## ENVELOPE OF THE MONTH.....THE PRIZE

**LADY DEATH,** John Cecil, Central City, KY

**MARTIAN MANHUNTER,** Luke Miller, Glendale, CA




**MANGA ELEKTRA,** Michael Shaffer, Sneads, FL

**PHOENIX,** Danton Ross, New York, NY

**In more words, we turn to Marvel's Iron-fisted Czar of Information, Bill Rosemann: "Sure, Andrew, I can just see it now: *Ultimate Sludge! The Further Adventures of Hardcase!*" the Czar sayeth with dripping sarcasm.**

**"I'm sorry, friend, but that particular bad purchase—among the many we made during the dark Ron Perelman ownership years—had to be the worst. So you can understand why we currently have no plans to bring back any of the characters we acquired through the Ultraverse buy-out. But if there's any companies out there interested in trading, give us a call...we may even throw in *Kickers, Inc.*!"**

### Dear Magic Words,

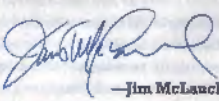
In *Ultimate Spider-Man*, will Gwen Stacy die like she did in the original *Amazing Spider-Man* series? Or will Mary Jane, maybe?

**Caleb Wimmer**
**Jewel Ridge, VA**

***Ultimate* writer Brian Michael Bendis ain't telling. Just ask him. "Ain't telling," he says. "But the Ultimate Dr. Doom and the Ultimate Baron Mordo are going to team up and use the Ultimate Ultimate Nullifier to get rid of that annoying Jewel Ridge place to build a Super Kmart, I hear."**

**Man, those bald Bolivian coven writers. They sure can get lippy.**

**But I'm outta lip service for the time being. It's been a hoot. Until next month, I remain...**



**—Jim McLauchlin**

*Jim McLauchlin reminds you that only you can prevent forest fires. Particularly the ones he starts.*

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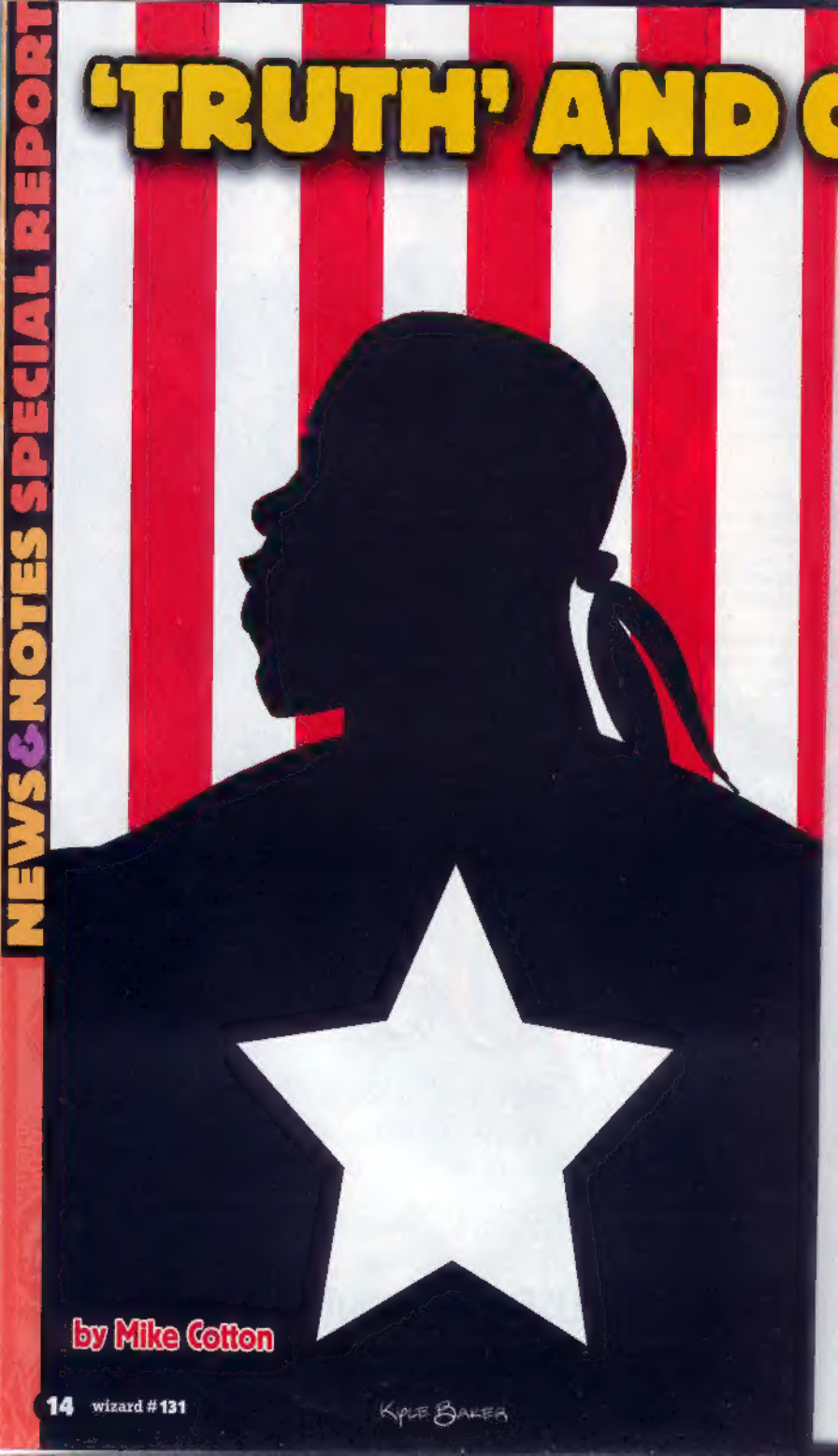
# 'TRUTH' AND C




by Mike Cotton

# ONSEQUENCES

## 'TRUTH' mini-series rewrites Marvel history, recasts original CAPTAIN AMERICA as a black man

Marvel Comic's first black superhero wasn't the Black Panther, Luke Cage or even the Falcon—it was Captain America.

No, not the square-jawed, blond-haired, blue-eyed beefcake Steve Rogers. Before Rogers ever got a dose of the super-soldier serum that transformed him into the American ideal made human—a perfect fighting machine for democracy, apple pie and the American way—there was another Captain America, an African-American hero Marvel never told you about.

Until now.

With this fall's *Truth* mini-series by writer Robert Morales and artist Kyle Baker (*King David*), Marvel Comics unveils the dirty side of the super-soldier program that created Captain America.

"While [*Truth*] is centered around black characters, this isn't only a 'black' story," noted Morales. "All history is shared history, and I hope fans will leave the book mindful of the different worlds we all live in."

In this in-continuity tale, planned for between five and six issues, it's revealed that the American government used human guinea pigs as test subjects to see if the super-soldier serum was ready to be used on Steve Rogers.

"Well, they wouldn't test this program on blond-haired, blue-eyed white boys like Steve Rogers," chuckled Editor Axel Alonso. "People who know what the word Tuskeegee' means know it. There's a real history to where America got its first super-soldier and it's a dirty history."

**THE FIRST CAP?** Marvel's *Truth* mini-series focuses on three African-Americans vying to become the first Captain America.

Between 1932 and 1972, the United States Public Health Service conducted an experiment on 399 black men in the late stages of syphilis in Tuskeegee, Ala. The men, for the most part illiterate sharecroppers from one of the poorest counties in Alabama, were never told what disease they were suffering from or of its seriousness. Informed that they were being treated for "bad blood," their doctors had no intention of curing them. The study was meant to discover how syphilis affected blacks as opposed to whites—the theory being that whites experienced more neurological complications from syphilis whereas blacks were more susceptible to cardio-vascular damage.

"*Truth* will follow three black men from the days just before we entered World War II to the battles of the war," described Alonso. "Issue #1 will introduce three men, one a working-class guy, another who's kind of black middle-class and a third who's upper class. One of them will become the first super-soldier—the first Captain America."

According to Alonso, the decision to drastically alter Captain America's origin wasn't a move that Marvel treated lightly.

"[Marvel President] Bill Jemas had the idea to make Captain America in the Ultimate Universe black and that incited some fan fury and frenzy of 'Oh, no, how could you do that?'" recalled Alonso. "That was very intriguing to me—that fans were so upset by even the idea of [Captain America being a black man.]"

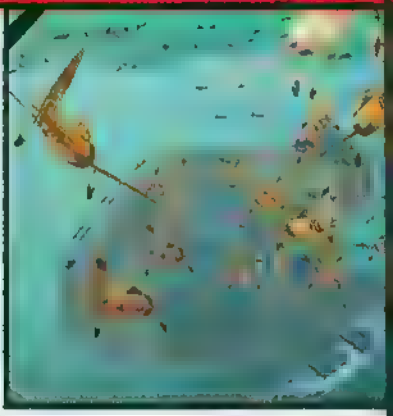
But according to Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada, *Truth* won't change Cap's 60-year history so much as it will enhance

**"Well, they wouldn't test this program on blond-haired, blue-eyed white boys like Steve Rogers."**

**–Axel Alonso, *Truth* editor**

ıl. "The beauty about *Truth* is that it doesn't alter Cap's history at all," explained the E-I-C. "It's more an addition to the Captain America legend, actually one that makes it richer and much more realistic. And keeping with the real world is something that we always strive for at Marvel."

The idea so infatuated Alonso he began calling top writers to discuss the idea—including *100 Bullets* co-creator Brian Azzarello and *Hulk* writer Bruce Jones, both of whom loved the idea. But Alonso didn't see either of them actually writing the series. Originally conceived as an out-of-continuity



*Starling Stories* tale like Azzarello's recent hit *Banner*, Jemas and Quesada perceived the series in a different way.

"I never thought they'd let me f--- with continuity this way," said Alonso. "But they were very excited about exploring it into Marvel continuity. Because of that, we'll actually have Captain America—Steve Rogers—cameo in the book. His path, and this other black Captain America's path, will cross and Steve Rogers realizes that if not for the color of this man's skin he could have been what Steve Rogers becomes—but this guy never had that chance."

While Marvel and Alonso are still keeping tight wraps on just how the story of *Truth* will unfold, Alonso did reveal the ending wouldn't be the average comic book ending.

"The point Robert's making with this story is very strong, very poignant and very unrelenting," revealed Alonso. "It's a very uneasy ending. This book is about politics, it's about race, it's about humanity and depravity—man's depravity to each other."

While Alonso and Marvel are riding high on a string of successes, such as J. Michael Straczynski's *Amazing Spider-Man* and the hip *X-Force* revamp, both hope *Truth* will be another critically-acclaimed, fan-embraced project. All involved realize *Truth* could be seen as a stunt or gimmick.

"It's not a change as much as it is a deepening of Cap's myth," explained Morales. "Heroism has as much to do with sacrifice as it does bravery. And here we learn about the terrible sacrifices that led to Steve Rogers' transformation."

*Starting next issue, Wizard takes a look at Alabama Hawkins, the new Spider-Man. It's a new take on an old hero, and we talked to him.*

# BRIGHT KNIGHT

## Marvel Knights' Cap tackles America's toughest problems

Change is inevitable—just ask the guy who's been around since World War II.

While the tell-all *Truth* mini-series may alter Captain America's history forever, it's not the only adventure Cap's dealt with lately. After canceling the *Captain America* ongoing series and relaunching it under the edgier, more violent Marvel Knights imprint, Marvel's seen Cap's popularity soar. Thanks in large part to John Cassaday's striking artwork and writer John Ney Rieber's ability to make Captain America not about superheroics or world-domination plots but about America, the title has jumped 26 slots to No. 7 on the Diamond Top 100 list.

"I don't know how you could write *Captain America* without saying something about America," admitted Rieber. "I see Cap not so much as the defender of the American status quo, but as the defender of the American dream. When the American reality catches up with the American dream, Cap will be able to retire. But not until then."

While the writer doesn't like to reveal what's in store for Cap after the current "Enemy" storyline that has dealt with the events of Sept. 11 and the war on terrorism, Rieber said he has definite plans to continue covering controversial subject matter in Cap.

"I feel very strongly that Cap should be about the tough questions," Rieber said. "If you really want people to consider a question, you have to ask the question in the right way. That's tough. And sometimes there just aren't any easy answers to the questions that we're faced with as a people, as a nation. That's tougher."

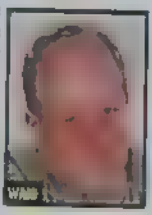
# THE BUZZBIN

THE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE COMIC INDUSTRY

**THRASHED** Every Tuesday, the editors at Marvel Comics get together with Editor-In-Chief Joe Quesada and President Bill Jemas to pitch new mini- and ongoing series. Reportedly, the meeting is so tough and so stressful that the room where the meeting's held has become known as "The Thrasher," since so few ideas ever get approved.

**ORIG 'N MAN'A** With the success of *Origin* over the last year, look for a number of other *Origin*-like projects from Marvel in the next 18 months. According to sources at Marvel, there are already origin stories planned for the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man.

**BOSS AT MARVEL** It's been years since painter Alex Ross has done monthly comic work like *Marvels* or *Kingdom Come*, but don't be surprised if he signs on for a six- or eight-issue Marvel mini-series some time soon.



**SUPER-MARK?** Sources at DC say that Mark Waid will finally get his chance at writing a Superman project later this year. However, expect it to be a one-shot or mini-series, not an ongoing title.

**THUNDER AGENTS HO!** Now that they have the rights to *Thunder-Cats*, DC continues to thunder forward, acquiring the rights to *Thunder Agents*, a Wally Wood/Steve Ditko '60s era comic. Expect Thunder Agents goodies later this year.

**NUCLEAR KRUEGER?** Writer Jim Krueger reportedly purchased a complete run of *Firestorm* back issues online, fueling the rumor that the *Earth X* writer may be taking on a Nuclear Man monthly title.

DUKE FROM G.I. JOE

**A REAL AMERICAN MUTANT** Rumors have it that Hasbro and Marvel are in negotiations for a possible G.I. Joe/X-Men crossover for some time later this year.

**FRAZETTA KICKS ASS!** Comic art legend Frank Frazetta was recently attacked by two Rottweilers while visiting a friend. The 74-year-old artist was able to fend off the dogs long enough for a neighbor to come to his aid and Frazetta escaped unscathed.

**CROM'S DEVILS!** The folks at Conan Properties are shopping the comic rights to Conan the Barbarian, and now that everything old is new again in comics, several publishers are champing at the bit to add Conan to their roster.

**ARTISTS IN DEMAND** Veteran comic artist Steve Skroce is done with his "Matrix" movie work, but has yet to resurface in the comics biz. A multitude of publishers are chasing after him, but Skroce seems set on developing a new creator-owned property. And Skroce's neighbor, *Incredible Hulk* cover artist Ariel Andrews, is also being wooed by several publishers looking to sign him to an exclusive.

**TOP COWBOY BEBOP** *Fathom* artist and Top Cow superstar Mike Turner may provide covers for an upcoming issue of Tokyopop's *Cowboy Bebop* comic.

**G.I. JOE: THE MOVIE?** *G.I. Joe* publisher Devil's Due is mulling around the idea of doing a *G.I. Joe: The Movie* special that'll poke some lighthearted fun at the original cartoon's controversial finale.

# 'HAWK-OWL' A HOOT

## New 'Ultimate' book takes light approach

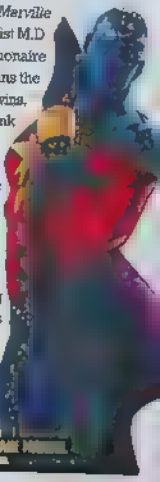
The next Marvel "Ultimate" book is not what you'd expect.

TV sitcom writer Ron Zimmerman and *Tangled Web* artist Duncan Fegredo will roll out *Ultimate Hawk-Owl, The Adventures of Hank Kipple* as a six-issue mini-series in September. The half-comedy, half-superhero title is part of a Marvel contest in which the new book will face off against a relaunched *Captain Marvel* #1 by Peter David and ChrisCross, and a new book called *Marville* by Marvel President Bill Jemas and artist M.D. Bright that follows a time-traveling billionaire from our future. The book that maintains the highest sales numbers for six months "wins," and the losers are faced with public dunk tanks and pies in the face.

In *Ultimate Hawk-Owl*, a brand-new superhero looking for a sidekick goes to an orphanage. He recruits the oldest boy there who has the least chance of being adopted. The boy, Hank Kipple, becomes the sidekick. Eventually...

"Hank's not excited about jumping into a suit," Zimmerman noted. "He gets what any boy would consider the greatest shot ever, but reacts to it the way a normal human being would react. This is dangerous stuff, after all."

■ JIM MCLAUCHLIN



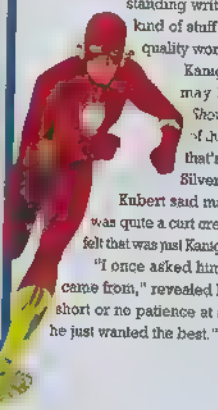
CAPTAIN MARVEL

# LEGENDARY DC CREATOR KANIGHER PASSES AWAY

One of DC Comics' most influential creators, Robert Kanigher—with a career that spanned five decades as a writer and editor—passed away in May at the age of 87.

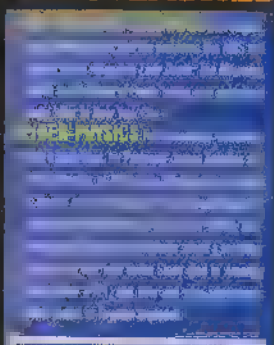
Best known for his work on *Sgt. Rock* with Kubert School founder and artist Joe Kubert, Kanigher developed a body of writing work that included stints on *The Flash*, *Wonder Woman* and *Weird War Tales*.

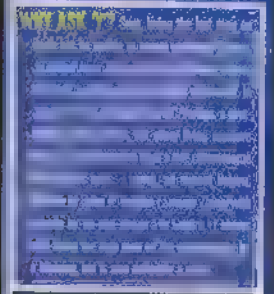
According to Kubert, Kanigher will be missed as a friend and collaborator. "I think he enabled me to do what I felt was some of my best work," said Kubert. "He was an outstanding writer. He was able to write the kind of stuff that made me do the better quality work I was able to achieve."

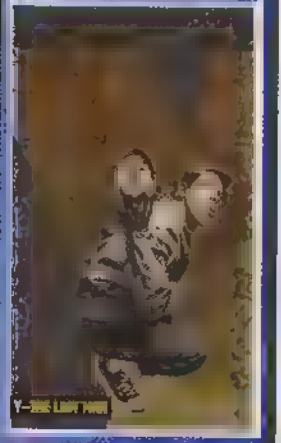


Kanigher's most influential work may be his scripting duties on *Showcase* #4, the first appearance of the Barry Allen Flash, the issue that's credited with beginning the Silver Age of comics.

Kubert said many artists thought Kanigher was quite a curt creator to work with, but Kubert felt that was just Kanigher's demand for excellence. "I once asked him where his 'rough' attitude came from," revealed Kubert. "He told me, 'I have short or no patience at all for lack of talent.' I think he just wanted the best." ■ MK







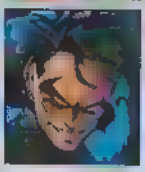
# JUSTICE LEAGUE REALIGNMENT

It's a new age for the JLA.

DC plans on pulling out all the stops during this summer's JLA mega-event "The Obsidian Age." Not only does the team discover that Aquaman might have survived his tragic death in last summer's "Our Worlds at War" crossover, but there may be a whole new JLA to look forward to in August's issue #69. While DC has decided to remain tight-lipped as to who the new members might be, here's a few candidates that *Wizard* thinks just might make the cut.

## FIRESTORM

Why this guy isn't on the JLA yet is beyond us. Let's face it, the Nuclear Man is easily one of the most powerful heroes in the DCU, and with seven of the DCU's mightiest out of commission, the new JLA's definitely gonna need a powerhouse. Not to mention, writer Joe Kelly has been pining after Firestorm since he took over *JLA*. **ODDS: 2-1**



## NIGHTWING

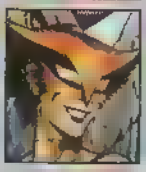
The team's going to need a new Batman figure, and who better to play resident detective than Batman's master apprentice, Nightwing. Plus, with the Bat-family becoming more dysfunctional than the Jacksons at an open bar, Dick Grayson's gonna be in need of a new support group. **ODDS: 5-1**

## DONNA TROY

After serving her time with the Titans, it's time for Wonder Woman's little sis to move up to the big leagues. Packing the same powers as her elder sibling, Donna Troy could definitely come in handy when it comes to hand-to-hand combat. She's in. **ODDS: 5-1**

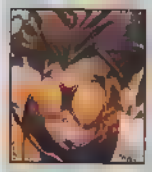
## GREEN ARROW

It's been awhile since the JLA has had a resident archer, and Ollie Queen is ready to prove himself once again. He's got the years, and could prove to be an invaluable teacher to a team of upstarts. **ODDS: 15-1**



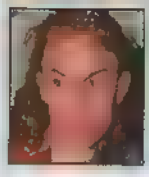
## HAWKGIRL

It seems like all Hawkgirl wants lately in both *JSA* and *Hawkman* is nothing but distance between her and her Thanagarian counterpart, Hawkman. Joining the JLA will definitely give her plenty of that. Plus, every superteam needs that certain someone who goes berserk every now and then, and Hawkgirl's one angry lady. **ODDS: 20-1**



## IMPULSE

The JLA needs a speedster, and Impulse needs to finally grow up (and cut that damn hair!). Here's his chance to prove to everyone that he's no little kid anymore, all while playing an invaluable role on DC's premier superteam. **ODDS: 100-1**



## CARROT TOP'S AGENT

Hey, don't roll your eyes; this guy's the most powerful man in Hollywood! If he can get the black hole talent that is Carrot Top those 1-800-COLLECT commercial gigs, who knows what other superpowers he might have! **ODDS: 500,000-1**

# SIMON SAYS MORE TRANSFORMERS

## Classic robot writer Furman returns with two projects slated for fall

Forget Megatron—Dreamwave is pulling out one of the Transformers biggest guns.

Dreamwave has tapped Simon Furman—the writer best known for his acclaimed *Transformers* work for Marvel during the '80s and '90s—to pen several new Transformer projects.

The first is October's *Transformers: The War Within* which takes place during Cybertron's distant past and chronicles the first encounter between rivals Optimus Prime and Megatron. This six-issue, monthly mini-series will not only give fans the histonc revelations behind the war between the Autobots and Decepticons, but introduces all-new, "original versions of favorites like Optimus, Megatron and Bumblebee. The series also marks the debut of artist Don Allan Figueroa.

*Transformers: Generation 1* artist Pat Lee can hardly contain his enthusiasm about the opportunity to work alongside this Transformer veteran.

"It should be incredible," said Lee. "He's going to answer a lot of the questions about the history of Transformers. It's going to bring a new flavor to our world."

Also in October, look for Furman to collaborate with several Dreamwave writers and artists on an as-yet untitled series, which serves as a handbook similar to Marvel's *Transformers: Universe* guides of the 1980s. Giving readers a comprehensive Generation One history, this four-issue, 96-page monthly will feature all-new artwork and biographies for over 350 Transformers. Dreamwave also hopes to enlist several high-profile artists to lend their talents to the project.

**SERIOUS UPGRADES** The new model of Grimlock (above) comes with loads of upgrades not standard on other Transformers.

The U.K.-based Furman hopes his arrival will turn both old and new fans onto Transformers.

"My fervent hope is that amongst all these amazing sales figures are some stats that belong to new readers," explained Furman. "Nostalgia's fine up to a point, but if Transformers is going to last another 18 years, we need new blood."

Old school Transfans should make note that U.K. publisher Titan Books is re-releasing several of Furman's classic stories via several trade collections. Look for the movie-inspired, classic *Transformers: Target 2006*, which reprints the very hard to find U.K. story-line this August. And in September, keep your optics peeled for *Transformers: Dark Designs* which collects the first six-issues of Marvel's '90s Generation 2 mini-series. ■ JAMES McDONOUGH

# DARK HORSE CONDUCTS NEW TALENT SEARCH

Got Internet access? Got an idea for a comic series?

If you answered yes to both questions, then Dark Horse Comics wants you.

If you've always had a dream of breaking into comics, Dark Horse has your hook-up. Just log onto **www.darkhorse.com/stripsearch** and enter your idea into the "Dark Horse Strip Search" contest.

"The Dark Horse Website receives thousands of hits every day, and we thought this would be a great way to showcase some new talent," explained *Strip Search* Editor Adam Gallardo. "With all of the hits on the site, this will provide extensive exposure for aspiring artists."

The rules for the contest are simple. Each month, Dark Horse will choose four short-story submissions and post them on their Website. Fans who visit the site will then get the chance to vote for their favorite submission, and the monthly winner will receive a Dark Horse prize package and be included in an anthology titled *The Best of Strip Search*. According to Gallardo, writers will need to pair up with an artist to be considered for the contest.

"At this point, the contest seems to favor writer/artist teams," said Gallardo. "But if a group of people want to get together for a pitch, that's perfectly legal."

At the end of the year-long competition, a Grand Prize winner will receive $1,000. The rules are available on the contest Website, along with a list of frequently asked questions. ■ CASEY SEIJAS

## REGENERATING MORE STATIC

# AMERICAN BEAUTY

## Cap 60th-anniversary hardcover snags top talent

For an old dude Captain America looks pretty good. Then again, the patriotic hero, created in 1941, has the best talent in comics keeping him sharp. This fall, Marvel Comics releases *Captain America: Red, White and Blue* a roughly 200-page hardcover featuring short stories by Alex Ross, Frank Quitely (*New X-Men*), Mark Waid (*Rose*), *Milk and Cheese*'s Evan Dorkin and many more to celebrate a belated 60th birthday for Cap. Here's a first look at Ross' artwork for the project ■ MIKE COTTON

# HEAT INDEX

Here's a bunch of cool things the *Wizard* staff read or saw this month! Check 'em out.

**80S MANIA** With both *G.I. Joe* and *Transformers* barely keeping our '80s jonesing in check, we're set to become full-blown nostalgia junkies with the upcoming *ThunderCats* and *Battle of the Planets* comics just months away. The '80s are officially back and we can't wait for more, especially now that there's rumors of a He-Man and the Masters of the Universe return.

**FABLES #1 (Vertigo/DC)** Writer Bill Willingham (*Pantheon*) has crafted a marvelously funny new series called *Fables* starring a cast of fairy tale characters–Snow White, Rose Red, King Cole, etc.–that have left Fableland to take up residence in modern day New York City. If the scene of Prince Charming skipping out on his check in a fancy restaurant, then bedding the waitress he stiffed, is any indication of what's to come, we hope this series lasts happily ever after.

**HUMBERTO RAMOS 'SPIDER-MAN' (Marvel)** With the kinetic, hip and ultra-cool art Humberto Ramos has become known for, the artist's taken the Green Goblin in *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* to the next level. Ramos has made Gobby look as ominous, evil and eerie as Paul Jenkins writes him–with pointed, angular features, along with boots and fingers that look like they could cut right through you.

**MARVEL LEGENDS SERIES (Toy Biz)** It might just be the best superhero toy line ever. Toy Biz's "Marvel Legends" line launched with jaw-dropping sculpts, insane articulation (30 points!) and dead-on paint jobs of Captain America, Hulk and Iron Man (right). Top quality + the coolest comic characters = YOU BUY NOW!

# GREEN GOBLIN CHARGED WITH MAILING FECES

The Green Goblin's at it again.

Not content to smash box office records as the villain of this summer's hit "Spider-Man," the web-slinger's arch-nemesis has been waging a one-man war on the citizens of a small town in Canada, complete with prank phone calls and feces mailing.

In late May, police in Belleville, Ontario arrested 40-year-old Eric Bird who allegedly sent over 100 envelopes containing cat feces and human urine to doctors, fast food businesses and media outlets in the area. Bird signed each package as either "Norman Osborne" or "The Green Goblin."

In addition to claiming to be the Green Goblin, Bird also peppered his packages of love with insults, addressing one such package to "No Hair Testicle [Dr. Blank]," reported *The Kingston Whig-Standard* newspaper.

In keeping with comic continuity, the Goblin's antics were foiled by his own stupidity. When the Goblin called police from a pay phone at a strip club to mock the authorities about stopping the reign of terror he had wrought on Belleville, an officer on duty recognized the background noise from what he believed to be the Boo Club, a nearby gentleman's establishment.

Moments later a group of officers spotted the faux-Goblin still on the pay phone and tackled him before he could unleash a barrage of pumpkin bombs or escape on his high-tech glider. ■ NK

# NEW CREATIVE TEAM NAMED ON 'SUPERMAN'

Steve Seagle and Scott McDaniel are packing their bags for some new digs—Metropolis, USA.

DC has announced that, starting with January's issue #190, Seagle (*The Crusades*) and McDaniel (*Batman*) will be the new creative team on *Superman*. They replace Jeph Loeb and Ed McGuinness, who move to the upcoming *Superman/Batman* series. According to Superman Group Editor Eddie Berganza, Seagle and McDaniel have one plan for their approach to the Man of Steel—amp up the action.

"Briefly talking about our plans, both Steve and Scott want to be kicking butt with Kal," Berganza stated publicly. "I don't know how much pie eating there will be."

Speculation on the new team for DC's flagship hero began after it was announced that Loeb and Jim Lee would be taking over *Batman* starting with October's issue #608. The latest announcement puts to rest any rumors that *Superman: Man of Steel* would be facing cancellation, and that the current *MoS* creative team of Mark Schultz and Yvel Guichet would be shuffled to *Superman*.

While Loeb lauded the *Superman* replacement team, he couldn't resist taking a parting shot—in jest of course.

"We were sort of hoping that the guy who does *Beanworld* (Larry Marder) would take over so we'd look like heroes," joked Loeb. "Instead, Eddie Berganza has found probably the second most talented artist—other than McGuinness—at DC in McDaniel. And Seagle has the distinction of being the only writer Tim Sale would leave me for." ■ CS

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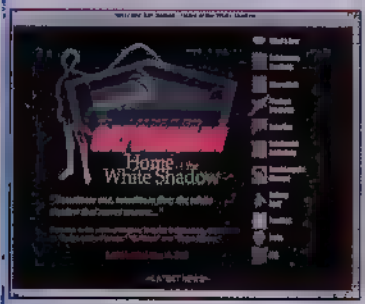
COOL COMICS-RELATED STUFF ON THE INTERNET

WEBCRAWLING MADE EASY

## SITE OF THE MONTH




### GATCHAMAN—HOME OF THE WHITE SHADOW

http://www.chronosite.com/gatchaman/

The release of *Battle of the Planets* #1 from Top Cow this month (July 17) is a dream come true for longtime fan Alex Ross whose dedication finally brought his pet project to four-color life. On the Web, there is a great, frequently updated site on "Gatchaman," the anime TV series on which *Planets* is based, which features information on all of G-Force's incarnations, an art gallery and an episode guide. Give it a look-see.

## JULY

DEEP BREATH AND "URGHH!"

**3** Two movies of note open today: for us, "Men in Black 2" (www.spe.sony.com/movies/meninblack), and for our [illegible] tastes, "The Powerpuff Girls Movie" (www.powerpuffgirlsmovie.com)! Also, pick up *Gen¹³* #0 (WildStorm/DC)—a preview of the upcoming relaunch by Chris Claremont and Adé Garza—for only 13 cents today! Art site: www.gen13.com

**4** Happy July 4th! Fun site: www.holidays.net/independence

**5** The greatest multimedia event of the summer starts today as *Wizard* invades Illinois for Wizard World Chicago 2002! Get tickets at www.wizard [illegible]

**23** Anime fans take note: "Escaflowne the Movie" from Bandai is released on DVD today! Official site: www.escaflowne.com

**24** *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* Vol. #1 (WildStorm/DC). Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill reunite the great literary heroes of the past to combat an invasion of Earth by Martians! Good site: www.alanmoorefanssite.com. Also, Marvel relaunches *Cable* as *Soldier X* today. Fan site: www.destinyshero.com

### GUILTY PLEASURE OF THE MONTH:

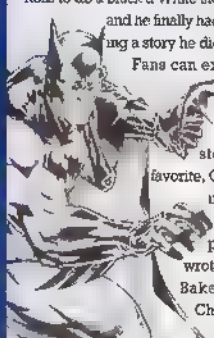
http://www.seethru.co.uk/zine/south_coast/helicopter_game.htm

# BACK IN BLACK & WHITE

## Ross, Sale tackle Batman special

Batman's going back to basics this summer. After the much touted success of 1999's *Batman: Black & White* collection, DC has announced they will publish a new volume of *Batman: Black & White* stories which previously appeared as back-up tales in *Batman: Gotham Knights*. However, with a list of the industry's top creators ranging from Brian Azzarello to Jim Lee to John Byrne, it's clear that these stories don't take a back seat to anything.

If that's not enough incentive to pick up the star-studded trade, *Black & White* Editor Mark Chiarello mentions that this volume will feature five never-before-seen stories. "I had been wanting Alex Ross to do a *Black & White* story since we did the original series, and he finally had the time to do one, so we're including a story he did with Paul Dini," said Chiarello.



Fans can expect all-new stories from Chris Claremont, Steven Seagle and Kelley Puckett.

When asked if any *Black & White* stories stood out as his personal favorite, Chiarello was quick to point out one in particular. "I have to say that—and I'm not just saying it because he just passed away—but Bob Kanigher wrote a really interesting story and Kyle Baker did a killer job with it," said Chiarello. "It was a great combination of a writer and an artist. Kyle's a genius, but putting him on a Kanigher story worked out really, really well." ■GS

# CHAOS! PAIRS A DEADLY DUO

## Lady Death, The Crow team up for crossover

They say misery loves company.

This September, Chaos! Comics unites James O'Barr's tortured angel of vengeance, The Crow, with its very own mistress of mortality, Lady Death. Tentatively titled *Lady Death/The Crow* #1, this 32-page one-shot written by *Obergeist*'s Dan Jolley with art by Romano Molenaar features the two pigmentally challenged heroes joining forces to liberate a tortured soul.

The crossover seemed like a perfect fit to *Lady Death* creator and Chaos! head honcho Brian Pulido.

"The idea of a *Lady Death/The Crow* crossover is irresistible," exclaimed Pulido. "Lady Death's story is dark, gothic and driven by love and vengeance. The same for The Crow. The results will be explosive." The tragic tale follows a New York photographer named Michael Shaw, who in typical Crow fashion returns from the grave via the guidance of a mystical crow on a mission to avenge those responsible for the brutal murder of Shaw and his wife. Sensing that a mysterious sorcerer has imprisoned the soul of Shaw's dead wife on this plane of existence, Lady Death joins his vengeful cause.

"This isn't going to be an action-heavy, slice-and-dice story," explained Jolley. "It'll be more gothic horror mixed with undying love, similar to what I did in *Obergeist*. I'm really hoping to come close to the feel that James O'Barr presented so perfectly in his original *Crow* mini-series." ■MHD

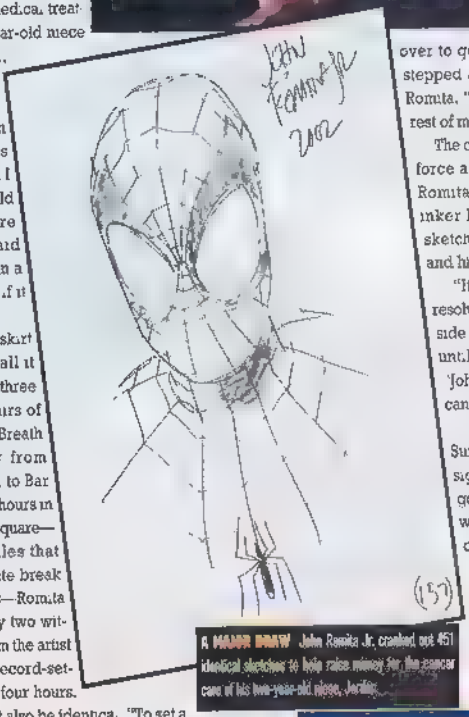
# MARATHON MAN

## 'Amazing Spider-Man' artist John Romita Jr. sets world record to fight cancer

"I feel like my face is falling off my skull." The face in question belongs to *Amazing Spider-Man* artist John Romita Jr., looking haggard and sporting three-day stubble as he stands inside New York's Planet Hollywood. And he's feeling spent with good reason. Romita has just capped a three-day binge of signing autographs and drawing sketches the weekend of May 10-12, setting a Guinness Book world record in the process. Tapping into Spider-hype on the weekend after the "Spider-Man" film opened and charging $25 per sketch, Romita appeared for a total of 51 hours, 26 minutes, raising in excess of $25,000 (with online auctions still pending) for the medical treatment of his two-year-old niece Jordan Atherton, who suffers from brain cancer.

"For charity, I'm sure a lot of guys would do this, and I felt Guinness would help attract more attention," said Romita, "I'd put on a skirt and lipstick if it would help!"

But wearing a skirt isn't necessary; all it takes for Romita is three T-shirts, three pairs of jeans and a ton of Breath Savers. Shifting from Planet Hollywood to Bar Code every eight hours in New York's Time Square—per Guinness rules that require a 15-minute break every eight hours—Romita Jr. was flanked by two witnesses who confirm the artist had fulfilled his record-setting duties every four hours. The sketches must also be identical. "To set a record, there must be uniformity," explained Romita. "It also allows me to sketch faster."



**A MAJOR DRAW** John Romita Jr. cranked out 451 identical sketches to help raise money for the cancer care of his two-year-old niece, Jordan.

Set up on a mini stage featuring a giant glossy photo of Jordan, Romita Jr. munched periodically on dried fruit and nuts for his only food during the marathon and swigged from a bottle of water. With just a single mechanical pencil, an eraser and a silver pen for autographs, the artist began his long run at 8:10 a.m. Friday, the five studs in his ear sparkling in the swirling lights and multi-screened movie previews and music videos. The first of 451 total sketches went to *Amazing Spider-Man* writer J. Michael Straczynski, who paid $1,000 for it, then donated the sketch back to Romita Jr. for auctioning.

Straczynski also got "Spider-Man" movie stars Tobey Maguire and Kirsten Dunst to sign a copy of *Amazing Spider-Man* #36 (the World Trade Center issue), along with himself, Romita Jr. and inker Scott Hanna, to be auctioned off.

With people standing in line for as long as two hours, Romita sketched as fast as he could, averaging four minutes per sketch. While sketching he'd talk with people ranging from 2 to 62, several of whom had relatives suffering from cancer and came out to lend support. All forms of media covered the event, notably MTV, whose "Total Request Live" on Friday featured Maguire and sent many teens over to get a sketch from Romita. "MTV stepped up when nobody else did," said Romita. "I will watch that channel for the rest of my life."

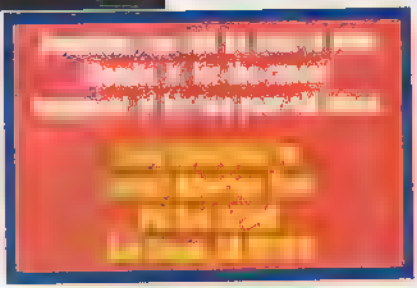
The comic community also came out in force as legendary Spidey artist John Romita Sr., Jim Lee, Scott Hanna and inker Bob Wiacek all stopped by to sketch and lend support to Romita Jr. and his wife Kathy.

"It was pretty amazing to see his resolve," said Lee, who sketched alongside Romita Jr. from 3-6 a.m. Sunday, until he was relieved by Romita Sr. "John is a class act and a madman. I can't believe he held up so well."

His signing stopped shy of 11:30 Sunday morning. "It was difficult," sighed Romita Jr. "I thought it was going to be horrible, but it was easier with my friends jeering me. It worked out pretty nice."

Romita paused to stare at the placard picturing his niece and then added, "With this weekend, she's got a chance and that's all we ask. I want to dance at her wedding."

■ BRIAN CUNNINGHAM



A BATTLE OF HYPOTHETICAL PROPORTIONS

# LAST WOMAN STANDING

comic battles you never thought you'd see

## ELEKTRA VS. SCARLETT

### THE COMBATANTS

TALE OF THE TAPE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5'9" | HEIGHT | 5'8" |
| 130lbs | WEIGHT | 135lbs |
| 39" | [illegible] | 38" |
| Sai | WEAPON OF CHOICE | Cross-bow |
| Deviled Eggs | FAVORITE FOOD | Snake Meat |

**Origins...** After her father was killed, Elektra Natchios went to Japan where she studied martial arts. Following years of intense ninja training, Elektra now works as one of the deadliest assassins in the world!

Raised by a family of martial arts instructors, Shana O'Hara enlisted in the military right out of high school. After years of rigorous training, O'Hara joined the top-secret G.I. Joe team and became the Joes' counter-intelligence expert, codenamed Scarlett!

**the battle...** During a routine press conference, G.I. Joe commanding officer General Hawk finds himself the target of assassination by Elektra. As the killer bounds from the crowd hurling a sai at Hawk's chest, she's amazed to see it shot out of the air with a crossbow bolt fired by Scarlett. Leaping at Elektra, Scarlett unleashes a volley of *shuriken* throwing stars, but like an expert ballerina, Elektra dodges the missiles in rudar—barely. Squaring off for hand-to-hand, Scarlett lands a kick to Elektra's midsection, then follows up with an elbow strike to her head. Stunned, Elektra counters with a roundhouse kick that rocks Scarlett back on her heels. Pressing her advantage, Elektra thrusts her sai through Scarlett's midsection, her Kevlar body armor the only thing saving her from death. Momentarily pinned on the sai, Scarlett desperately shoots a crossbow through Elektra's foot, keeping her grounded. With the blunt end of her sai, Elektra smashes Scarlett's face, turning it into a kaleidoscope of agony as blood and teeth go flying. Drawing her sidearm, Scarlett gets off a shot that takes a chunk out of Elektra's shoulder, and pulling herself off the sai, she lands one last sweep kick to Elektra's head that turns the assassin's lights out. As Elektra's led away by the security team, the battered Scarlett quips, "Sugar, I eat ninjas for breakfast. Tell Cobra to try a little harder next time."

this month's battle painted by GREG HORN

# FIRSTLOOK

# BRATH

## CrossGen's barbarian spins off into his own series by Chuck Dixon

If you only think of Conan when you think of huge, battle-scarred barbarians, CrossGen's got a wake-up call for you.

Beginning in January, the character Brath—who first appeared in CrossGen's *Sigil*—will get his own ongoing title of the same name by writer Chuck Dixon (*Nightwing*) and penciler Andrea Di Vito.

"Brath isn't Conan," explained Dixon. "Brath has a family and an entire people he wants to protect against an invading force akin to the Roman army. Their army's better equipped than Brath's, better trained and obviously more powerful in terms of size but it wouldn't be interesting if they weren't would it?"

According to Dixon, the army attacking Brath's people have a technological advantage too—while Brath's people still live in huts, their enemies have a city much like Rome at the peak of its empire with running water and bricked streets.

But that doesn't mean Brath's people are done for.

"Brath's people are warriors, so much so they sometimes don't want to listen—they'd rather fight," Dixon says. "But Brath also has a [superpowerful] Sigil that lets him see a battle unfold in his mind. He doesn't see the future, but much like Alexander the Great, he can see how a battle will unfold, where to use the land, where to stage battles. He's very good at seeing other armies weaknesses and faults in their plan of attack."

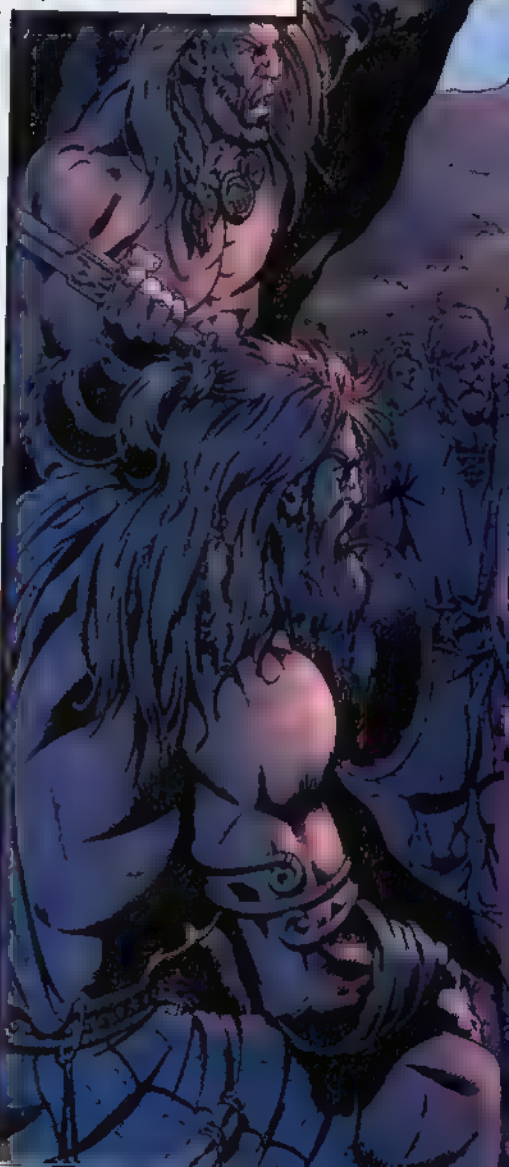
*Brath* won't just be about huge, epic battles, according to Dixon. It'll also focus on the relationships of Brath's family and his enemies.

"There will be betrayals in this story," promised Dixon. "Who Brath can trust and who he can't won't always be clear to him or to the reader."

In fact, even before he's betrayed, there's already conflict in Brath's village. According to Dixon, one of Brath's first jobs as leader of his people is to convince them not to attack their enemies head on. The writer admits that the "hit it until it stops moving" philosophy of combat won't be the one that wins Brath and his followers the war.

"Brath and his people are great barbarian warriors, but that won't always be enough to save them," explains Dixon. "As much as a battle may be about brute strength or warrior skill, Brath must outwit his opponents—that's something he and his people haven't had to do before."

BY MIKE COTTON



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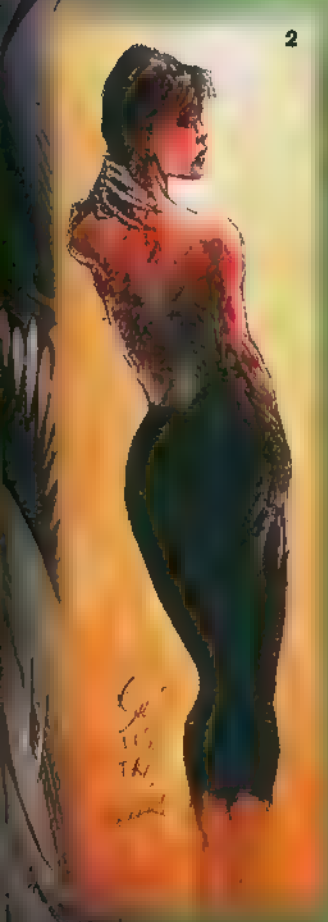
# COW BOYS

by
Jim McLauchlin

**The Top Cow crew of Michael Turner, Marc Silvestri and Dale Keown round up an exclusive look at their all-new, upcoming projects**




These days, Top Cow Productions is full to bursting with new creators, new projects and—perhaps most importantly—a dash of the old to go with it. The publisher's most important assets—artists Marc Silvestri and Michael Turner—are back full-time. And that ain't no bull.

"There's a new energy here, no doubt," beams Silvestri, who founded the image imprint 10 years ago. "When we're at our best, we're a giant."

Of late, Silvestri himself seemed apart from the herd, as he was rarely seen at the drawing board because he was negotiating business deals. But he returned to the ranch this year by drawing *Inferno: Hellbound*, and will spin out into other new and exciting projects in 2003.

Turner was put out to pasture for a while as he fought a winning battle against cancer. His *Fathom* is back on track, and he'll supplement that by drawing the anniversary *Tomb Raider* #25 and launching two new series next year.

"It's great to come here," enthuses Turner. "There's a fun factor, a real bouncy vibe to this place, and we're getting our work done."

The sheer force of gravitational attraction has sucked others in. Superstar painter Alex Ross lends his talents to *Battle of the Planets*, a major launch that catches the wave of '80s nostalgia, and long-time fan-favorite Dale Keown brings his monstrous vision to *The Darkness*.

Curious? Top Cow threw open the barn doors and gave us a sneak peek at some of their works in progress, so saddle up!

## 1. THE DARKNESS

Dale Keown returns in December with a relaunched *Darkness* #1 written by Paul Jenkins (*Origin*). Mob hitman Jackie Estacado, the bearer of the supernatural Darkness force, is back. And a much more horrific beast is in the works.

"The book is called *The Darkness*," Keown points out, stressing the name. "It's supposed to be scary."

Keown, known for drawing monstrosities on *Incredible Hulk* and *The Pitt*, will amp up the fear factor of the Darklings. "Paul and I want to get away from the Darkling creatures as comedic relief," he explains. "They'll still be there but more as a shadowy, scary presence. I like drawing 'em all shapes and sizes, but always deformed and freakish. With big teeth."

## 2. CYBLADE

Top Cow taps into its roots with the tentatively titled *Eva*, a spring 2003 launch co-written by Marc Silvestri and David Wohl (*Witchblade*) with art by Silvestri that relaunches the Cows original superteam, Cyberforce, and finally gives them a true origin.

A cadre of time-traveling villains escape to our time, followed by a number of heroes who would stop them, including this lovely lass. "She's the original, or new-and-improved Cyblade, depending on how you look at it," relates Silvestri, referring to the Cyberforce member. She's more than just that. "I chose this angle to show her tech, which for her is going to be mostly visible on her back. Plus, she should look elegant. She's a combination of creepy-cool and sexy."

## 1. EVIL WEARS A HAT

Another unnamed villain was inspired by an old favorite of Silvestri's. "I wanted to make a really dapper villain in the vein of the original Avengers' TV series, a very proper gentleman who happens to be a very evil guy," he details. "The bowler hat kind of completes the look."

Silvestri says this baddie is a middle step, technologically speaking. "He's an amalgam of the tech that was used in the original *Cyberforce* series and what will be used in the future. He's not quite as put-together like the other characters are, but he wants to be."

## 2. MACHINE MAN

Silvestri calls this unnamed bad guy from the future "the sum of all our fears, in a way. He represents the fear of what we don't want to become—machines rather than men."

Silvestri drew from another tech-laden medium in the design. "There are probably some influences from manga stuff I've seen in the past," he notes. "I like that look, and like designing the big, imposing villain."

## 3. HEATWAVE

Silvestri has been sitting on these designs since 1998, when he was developing *Eve* as a TV series. "It never quite worked out," he says. "But realized just had to use these characters. Basically, *Eve* is reinventing the characters that everyone knew and loved in *Cyberforce*."

One such character is the new Heatwave, who can generate and control heat due to the future tech. "It almost looks like tattoo work under the skin, as opposed to on the skin," describes Silvestri. "This guy is a normal individual in his time, but back in our time, he's a superhuman."

# DRAGONFLY

## 1. FAIRY

Michael Turner's long-awaited *Dragonfly* will have a new name by the time the continuing series rolls out in 2003. Turner will draw and co-write the series, which features a young boy destined to save the world with his amazing mental powers.

The boy is one of a few humanoids who can access these abilities, but the power has been "turned off" for 5,000 years. Now, a natural cycle is turning the power back on, and the fairy you see here is charged with guiding him.

"The fairy is very bitter about what happened last time," informs Turner. "Some of the empowered people didn't use their abilities in the best way, and really exploited them. So she's pissed off about this new situation."

## 2. QUADRIPLEGIC

The male villain of the story is a tortured soul. "This guy's a quadriplegic, and has effectively been confined to a wheelchair for the past 5,000 years," relates Turner. "But because the cycle has come around, he's able to move his hands and feet again using his brain."

Turner thinks the design defines the character. "That's bitterness, man," explains Turner. "He's pissed. Imagine not being able to move for 5,000 years, but knowing you once had massive power. He's got some issues to work out."

## 3. CHECKMATE

Michael Turner rolls out a conspiracy of "Prisoner"-like proportions in *Checkmate*, a 2003 mini-series he will draw himself and co-write with a screenwriter he is still seeking out. Real people are being used as chess pieces on a board that is the city they live in by two powerful, unseen forces. Moves start when innocent "pieces" receive scary messages.

Turner, an avid chess player himself, loves the strategy of writing the series. "Sometimes you have to sacrifice players," he warns. "It sucks to be a pawn."

## 4. PIGTAIL GIRL

Back to *Dragonfly*, Turner, a fan of what he calls the "perky, spunky" look, designed this as-yet-unnamed girl as the side-kick to the savior in the story.

"She's the best friend of the boy, and they're sent on the adventure that teaches him about his abilities," explains Turner. "[During that time], they meet many of the people who were there for the old cycle."

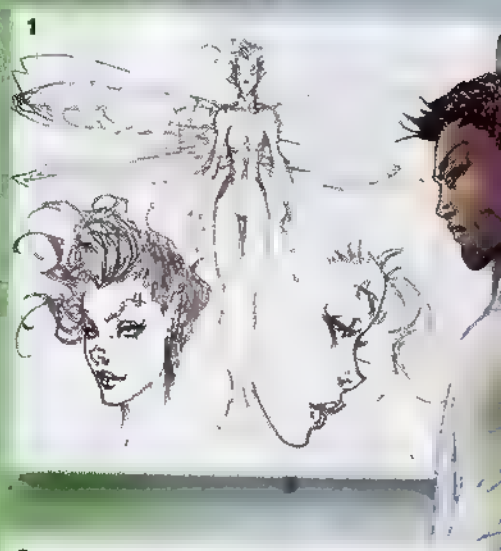
Personalities will conflict between the girl and the guardian/fairy, though. "[The pigtail girl is] positive, bubbly and just irritates the hell out of the fairy," laughs Turner.

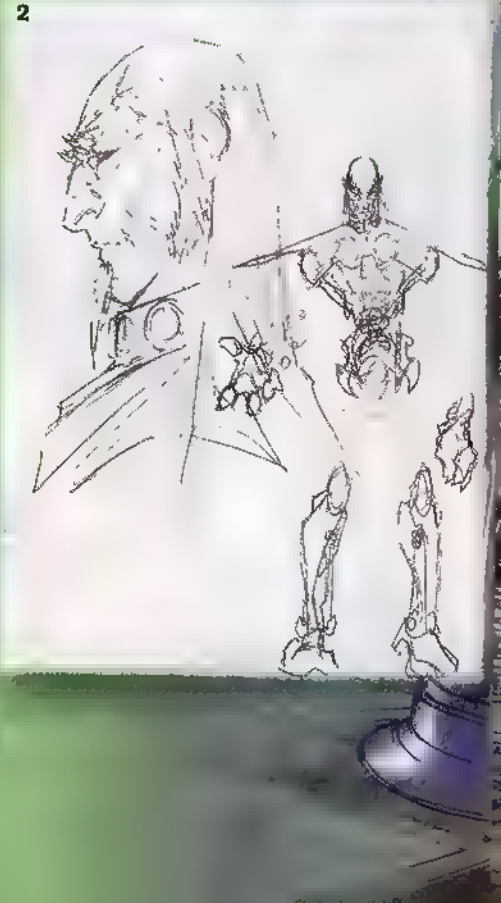
## 5. VILLAIN

The yet-to-be named villain was born out of Turner's stay in the hospital when he was recovering from cancer surgery.

"You know how I drew that?" asks Turner. "I pressed the morphine clicker three times, then I started drawing. Eight minutes later, I passed out. I really don't know for sure if that's gonna be anybody. Just a random character. And that's the true deal."

*Contributing Editor Jim McLauchlin would like to remind you that you don't eat corn chips—you throw them.*



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CHECKMATE

By James Mahoney

# LION KINGS

**The fearless FELINES from the '80s claw their way back to the top in an exclusive 'THUNDERCATS' preview**

Cats may have nine lives, but after more than 15 years out of the spotlight, all these frisky felines need are two.

That's right, cat lovers! The '80s juggernaut rolls on as the ThunderCats come roaring back this August with a WildStorm zero issue by newcomer Ford Gilmore and fan-favorite artist J. Scott Campbell, followed by a five-issue mini-series by Gilmore and superstar artist Ed McGuinness (*Superman*)!

Lion-O, Panthro, Tygra and the rest of the superpowered, half-man/half-cat heroes from the classic Saturday-morning cartoon are back battling the evil priest Mumm-Ra and his cronies, and McGuinness is as happy as the Cheshire Cat. The artist, a self-professed "ThunderCats freak," has been waiting a long time for this opportunity to cross his plate.

"My goal is to give the people what they like," explains the 28-year-old New England native. "I want to keep this as faithful as possible to the original designs. There's a certain amount of fan expectation that has to be met. I'm not doing my version of the ThunderCats and I'd like to keep to that, because I have a certain level of expectation for this myself."

This is going to be a book for fans by fans," agrees Gilmore, a film and TV producer whose extensive knowledge of the original "ThunderCats" toon convinced WildStorm he was the right man for the job. "When I found out Ed was going to draw the book, I did backflips! I really can't think of a better fit."

Picking up right where the cartoon left off, the first issue of the mini-series finds the ThunderCats attempting to rebuild their home world of Thundera, which has been restored to its former glory. (In the show, Thundera was on the verge of destruction, which forced the ThunderCats to flee to a planet called Third Earth.) However, that peace is short-lived, as the Ancient Spirits of Evil (Mumm-Ra's bosses) send in the nefarious Shadowmaster to infiltrate the Cat's Lair (ThunderCat headquarters) to wreak all kinds of havoc. The rest of the series eventually reveals a much bigger picture and sets the stage for a second, darker mini-series in the fall, which is described as the ThunderCats' worst nightmare come true.

Eighties nostalgia aside, WildStorm Editorial Director Jim Lee feels the time for a ThunderCats comeback is long overdue.

"There's a huge following for the property and it just hasn't been tapped," observes Lee. "I'd see stores selling ThunderCats T-shirts and other merchandise. It's funny—when you mention ThunderCats to people in the industry, there's a visible reaction. Their eyes light up."

I don't know if it's so much the core of ThunderCats as it is the whole [mystique]," adds McGuinness. "Of course, you had the awesome character design and the action. But there was so much more. I can remember the music and certain scenes that made it work so perfectly. It's the whole package. That's what we're going to try and capture. Trust me, I'm gonna push the envelope with this."

Whether you're ready to relive the magic or hear the roar for the first time, look to the right because the 'Cats are loose for an exclusive six-page preview.

**CAT'S MEOW** Lion-O and the *ThunderCats* roar back!

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THUNDERA?
WE CAN'T SEE, WISE ONE
THAT'S STRANGE. WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HAVING AN ECLIPSE AT THIS TIME OF YEAR.
PLUS THIS ONE'S HAPPENING FAST AND BLANKETING THE ENTIRE PLANET!
THE DARKNESS IS BLOTTING OUT ALL OUR SENSORS
ALREADY ON MY WAY!
CHEETARA! GO OUT TO SECTOR 7 AND SEE WHAT'S GOING ON!

THAT'S ODD
IT'S LIKE A FLOOD OF BLACK WATER
BUT WHERE'S IT COMING FROM?
HELLO CHEETARA
I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.
SHEEN

DON'T WORRY LITTLE KITTEN I'M NOT GOING TO HURT YOU. YET
YOU MUST DELIVER A MESSAGE FOR ME FIRST
!
TELL THE OTHERS THAT SHADOWMASTER IS COMING TO KILL THEM. AND MOVE QUICKLY

HE'S OBVIOUSLY MORE POWERFUL THAN WHEN LION-O FACED HIM LAST, BUT HE CAN'T JUST FLOOD US OUT. SO WHAT'S HIS PLAN?
I NEED TO GET A BETTER LOOK
THUNK!
GREAT JAGA!

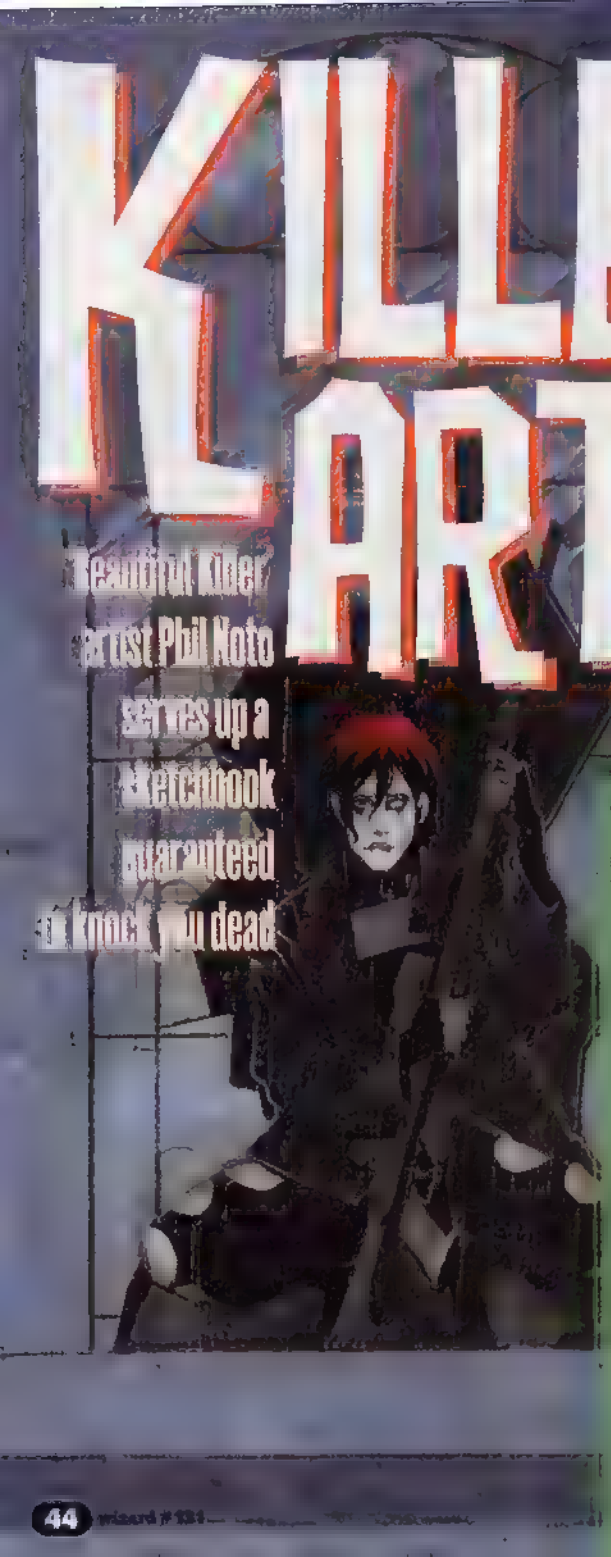
HE'S CREATING AN ARMY OF SHADOW-CREATURES!
AS SOON AS THE ECLIPSE IS COMPLETE, I SHALL STRIKE--AND THE THUNDERCATS SHALL FALL!
HA HA HA HA
"IT'S THE SHADOWMASTER! HE'S ABOUT TO ATTACK US WITH A HORDE OF CREATURES OF PURE DARKNESS!

THUNDER!
THUNDER!
THUNDER!
THUNDERCATS...
CONTINUED IN THUNDERCATS #1 ON SALE AUGUST 21.
DON'T MISS THUNDERCATS #0 ON SALE AUGUST 7.

# KILLER ART

By James [illegible]

Beautiful Killer artist Phil Noto serves up a sketchbook guaranteed to knock you dead



## "HE'S PERFECT!"

Those were the only words Dial creator Jo[illegible] Palmiotti could think of after he first saw Phil Noto's artwork at a table at Dr and MegaCon two years ago.

"I was looking for an artist for the *Beautiful K* project I was pitching," remembers Palmiotti. "I went to his table, flipped through his sketchbook and was instantly sold on his work."

The result is a new Black Bull series debuting in July. Written by Palmiotti and illustrated by Noto, *Beautiful Killer* chronicles the story of Brigid Cane (left), a young assassin out to avenge the murders of her parents.

After rendering covers for DC's *Birds of P* and *Codename: Knockout*, as well as pencils for *Batgirl* #27, the 36-year-old Noto feels *Killer*'s the perfect opportunity to flex his creative muscles.

"Brigid's not like established characters like Superman or Batman," notes Noto, an Orlando-based Disney artist. "There are no preconceived notions of what she should look like. This series gives me a chance to try out a bunch of different styles. I get to see what works and what doesn't."

"Looking at his stuff reminded me of the '[illegible] art style of the Bob Peak age of advertising and a little bit of the 60s James Bond posters," explains Palmiotti. "He uses classic design elements that aren't utilized much in comics today."

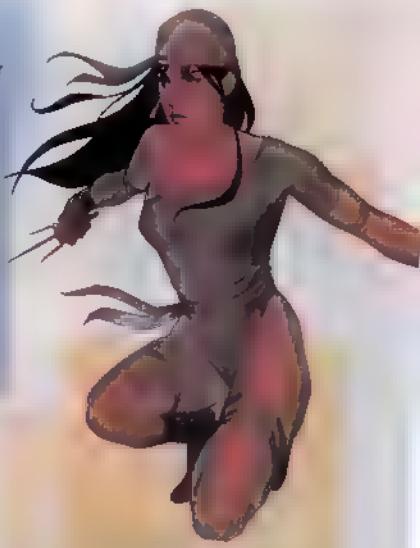
Wanna see what sold Palmiotti on Noto? Check out his sketches ahead and judge for yourself!

## BRIGIT COLE

"Phil draws Brigit the way I always pictured her," admires Palmetto. "He makes her very sexy and lean. His facial expressions are also very dead on just the way I wanted her handled."

"I try to envision her first in the real world, then give my twist on it," elaborates Mota. "I think this allows readers to see multiple shades of her character in one image. She's sexy, powerful and insecure all at once."

But what's with the holes in her costume? Palmetto insists they're more about practicality than about fashion. "You ever wear tight leather pants?" laughs Palmetto. "It gets hot in there."

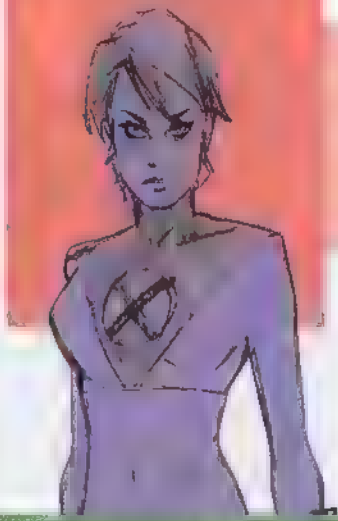


When it comes to drawing that other beautiful assassin in comics, Mota draws his inspiration from the masters. "I've always been a big fan of the character since Bill Sienkiewicz painted *Elektra Assassin*," explains the artist. "Sometimes I'll try to use that '80s, very angular illustration style of his, but not as exaggerated because I could never do it as well as him. I like that general style and feel of his work, as well as the energy that it emits." And it's that energy that Mota feels is an integral element when drawing the character. "She's a Batman type of character," says Mota. "A cool-looking female who relies on her natural abilities, so you associate her with action. That's why I put her in a crouching position—I wanted something a little different than your standard pin-up pose. I'd love to do something in color with her."

## VAMPIRELLA

Mota takes a different approach than his usually subtle style when tackling Harris Comics' blood-sucking diva. "Vampirella is one of those characters that you can put in a sexy, *Playboy, Sports Illustrated* pose and get away with it," says the artist. "I wanted to capture the sexiness of those classic Warren covers. There's not a lot of costume, so she's all about the pose." This sketch transports Mota back to his school days. "When I first saw her as a young boy, I was like, 'Wow!'" chuckles Mota. "I remember back in middle school, a friend of mine had a couple of copies of *Vampirella*. It was crazy—here was this sexy comic book warrior who looked so real, she wasn't your standard four-color Marvel Comics' girl. It was kind of taboo."

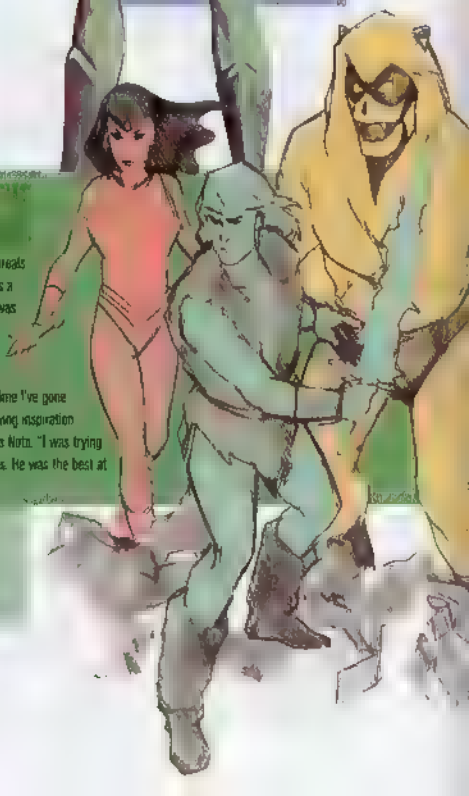
Noto's inspiration for his rendition of the crimson-haired mutie cutie from Marvel's X-Force (renamed *X-Static* in July) was fairly straightforward. "I just really liked the character," laughs Noto. "She's just a really cool-looking girl. This is one that I'd really like to do in color. The skin tone and red hair—the whole package is just great. I really like the outfit, too. It's a cool '60s style almost like something off the old 'Star Trek' series." Noto also loves the opportunity to pay homage to one of his favorite contemporary artists. "I've always been a big fan of Mike Allred's work," notes the artist. "I love the simplicity of it, the clean lines and its real retro feel. Every panel looks good and each character has their own little quirkiness. It doesn't look as cartoony as animation, but at the same time, it has a nice pop art feel."



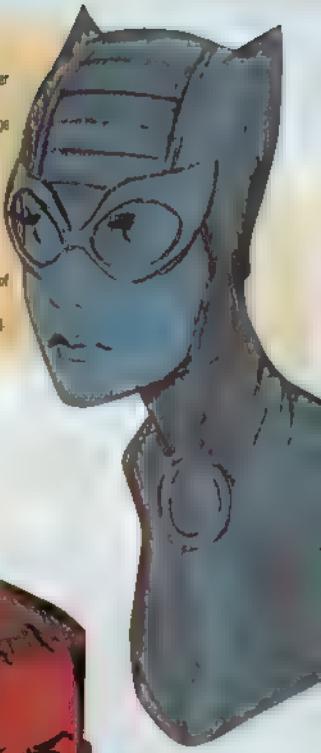
## WONDER WOMAN

At first, Noto was a little reluctant to take on the Amazonian emissary, who also just happens to be one of his favorite comic book icons. "I've been hoping to sit down and paint a realistic version of her," reveals Noto. "But it's a little daunting because Adam Hughes and Alex Ross have pretty much cornered the market on her. But the artist didn't let the intense competition spoil the opportunity for him to leave his mark. "I wanted to figure out my own interpretation of her, but didn't want to change it around too much. I gave her the *Kingdom Come*-type loincloth. I wanted to get away from the bikini brief outfit and play with a more Amazonian look. She's one of those icons—an all-American superhero and you have to do her right." Adds Noto, "I'd never draw her in a laying down pose with a come hither look in her eye. That may work for Poison Ivy, but never for Wonder Woman."

For this sketch, Noto flashed back to the days of sugar-laced cereals and Saturday mornings spent plopped in front of the TV. "This is a very nostalgic piece for me—reminisces the artist. "Thundarr' was one of my favorite cartoons and I used to draw him all the time when I was a kid. The show had a very comic book-ish, cartoony look to it and I wanted to try and do the characters in my style, giving them a realistic edge. This is actually the first time I've gone back and drawn it." Once again, Noto tackles this piece by drawing inspiration from some of the greatest in the game. "Frank Frazetta," relates Noto. "I was trying to capture one of those classic Frazetta barbarian action stances. He was the best at creating all sorts of tension with the most subtle of poses."

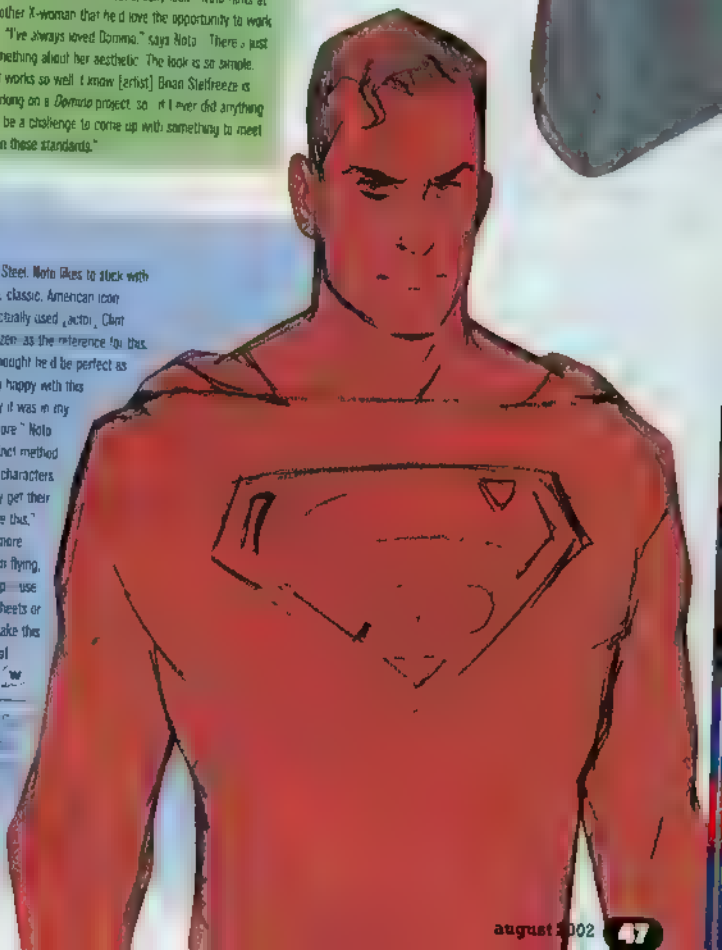


This head shot of Gotham's most infamous cat burglar scratched an itch that Noto has had for quite some time. "This piece helped satisfy my overwhelming urge to get a Catwoman illustration down on paper," explains Noto. "I'm a big fan of [Catwoman artist] Darwyn Cooke's redesign and think the new costume is perfect. It's simple and sexy, but not silly; very utilitarian, and a lot more useful than a leather suit and a pair of cat ears." But Noto insists he's not finished with this pretty kitty just yet. "She'd be a lot of fun to draw," gushes the artist. "There's just so much that you can do with her. I really can't wait to do a full-figure illustration of her."



## ROGUE

Noto likes to keep things simple when it comes to the X-Men's southern belle. "This has always been my favorite version of the character," explains Noto. "The simplicity of the design is great—nothing too flashy. This is easily one that I could have done in a flying or more actiony pose, but I kept things simple and went with a more subtle, sexy look." Noto hints at another X-woman that he'd love the opportunity to work on. "I've always loved Domino," says Noto. "There's just something about her aesthetic. The look is so simple, but works so well. I know [artist] Brian Stelfreeze is working on a *Domino* project, so if I ever did anything it'd be a challenge to come up with something to meet even these standards."



## SUPERMAN

When it comes to the Man of Steel, Noto likes to stick with the classics. "I like the simple, classic, American icon Superman," reveals Noto. "I actually used actor Clint Walker from the 'The Dirty Dozen' as the reference for this. He's this huge guy—I always thought he'd be perfect as Superman." He adds, "I'm very happy with this piece. It came out just the way it was in my head. Definitely want to do more." Noto also reveals there's a very distinct method to his madness. "When I draw characters for the first time, before I really get their look down, I'll do something like this," he explains. "After that, I'll do more action stuff—something with him flying, fighting or picking something up. I use illustrations like this as model sheets or a character turnaround, then I take this and use this model in any kind of action pose that I want."

# The G

**BULL OF THE BIKE** Marvel Editor Axel Alonso has grumbled with the likes of some of Marvel's toughest—like Spider-Man—and has lines for rolled scrolls.

# mbler

By Casey Seijas

**By taking daring risks with conventional superheroes like SPIDER-MAN, HULK and the X-MEN, AXEL ALONSO has earned the title of the best editor in comics**

**Axel Alonso has only been to Las Vegas once.** He rarely plays the lottery, and doesn't even participate in an occasional game of small-stakes poker with his buddies.

Despite his conservative nature, the 36-year-old Marvel editor is easily the biggest gambler in comics. His more notable wagers that have paid off handsomely for Marvel include *X-Force* (which will be re-named *X-Static* in July), an X-title destined for the chopping block only to be saved by Alonso's offbeat choice of DC/Vertigo staple Peter Milligan and indy legend Mike Allred as the creative team. Or when Alonso turned to forgotten veteran Bruce Jones to revitalize the once-stale-now-white-hot *Incredible Hulk*, over several more popular writers pining for the job. Expanding the Spider-Man line, risky revamps and decisions for MAX titles—the list of Alonso's long-shot gambles goes on and on.

"Look at his track record," explains Jones. "It's a catalog of long shots, risk taking and Hail Mary's. Axel's the James Dean of comics: He loves to rock the boat, shake things up. He'd much rather go down in flames than get by on pabulum."

Yet despite his high-risk gambles, Alonso remains the coolest player at the poker table. Soft-spoken, collected, never giving a hint if he's holding a full house or if he's bluffing. And like a high-rolling gambler, Alonso's energetic-yet-cool approach to creating comics has given him a reputation that precedes him long before he sits down at the table and tosses in his ante.

"He's one of those editors that everyone seems to know by name, so just having a meeting with him was great," says newcomer Zeb Wells, who recently wrote a *Tangled Web* and *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* story for Alonso. "Everything since then has just been a blur. It's good to be one of Axel's boys."

And even though being one of "Axel's boys" doesn't come with a secret handshake or oath, there's a level of loyalty between Alonso and the talent he works with that can only be matched by a fraternity or elite branch of the military. It's a loyalty that's not only found on a professional level, but a personal one as well. And it's that loyalty and willingness to take chances and a laid-back enthusiasm that's made Alonso one of the most sought-after editors in comics.

And that you can bet on.

**The phone's glued to Alonso's ear** as he sits in his 10th-floor office, which overlooks a busy 40th Street in midtown Manhattan. On the line, up-and-coming painter extraordinaire Kaare Andrews. Alonso admits he'll call his talent at the very least once a week, not so much to badger them about deadlines, but just to talk. After the two discuss a minor problem with an upcoming *Incredible Hulk* cover, the conversation somehow shifts to a tongue-in-cheek debate concerning who they think is the "dreamiest" creative team in comics.

"I've gotta go with Mike and Pete," deadpans Alonso, referring to the *X-Force* duo.

Alonso speaks in a manner that's eloquent, but peppered with hip-hop slang, and he always manages to punctuate his conversations with his trademark phrase, "You follow me?" just to make certain whomever he's talking to—be it an industry rookie like Wells or a superstar like *Amazing Spider-Man*

writer J. Michael Straczynski—are on the same page as he.

The walls of his humble office have been replaced with corkboards, from which hangs black-and-white preview copies of upcoming *Incredible Hulk* and *X-Statix* issues, various Spider-Man titles and countless in-the-works MAX series. The only other visible decor are torn-off covers from *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN: The Magazine* which prominently display his favorite basketball player Allan Iverson. Alonso later reveals Iverson, a.k.a. "The Answer," was the inspiration behind Spike from *X-Force*.

Alonso momentarily excuses himself from his conversation, just long enough to whisper, "Take a look at anything you see on the wall. I'd suggest *Rawhide Kid*. It's f—ing hilarious." He then turns and dives right back into his conversation without missing a beat.

For many creators, Alonso only exists as a voice over the phone. Jones, for example, has never met Alonso in person.

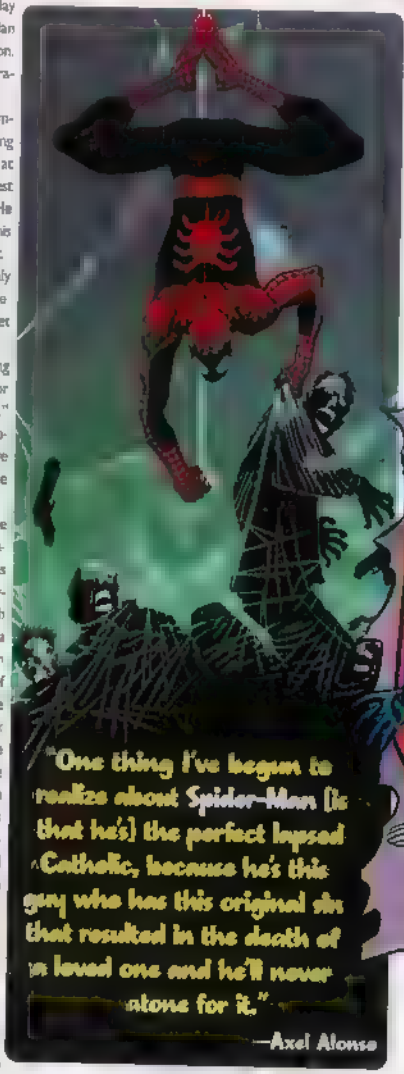
"Axel and I have been working together on and off now for four or five years, and we've never met," explains Jones. "I have this gauzy, fabricated image of him whenever we speak on the phone and I'm sure he has a similar image of me."

Despite the fact the two have what many may consider a less-than-personal relationship, Alonso, Jones and penciler John Romita Jr. have revolutionized Marvel's Green Goliath from a silly, nearly dead title into a must-read psycho thriller on par with movies like "Seven." As a matter of fact, after Alonso was given the responsibility of editing *Incredible Hulk* almost a year ago, sales of the title increased dramatically, causing the book to jump from the low 50s to a top 20 seller according to Diamond's distributors list. No small feat, especially when you factor in the internal pressure he was faced with when given a mandate from Marvel President Bill Jemas to make *Incredible Hulk* a top seller by the time the 2003 "Hulk" film hit theaters.

*Incredible Hulk*'s recent success is a prime example of Alonso's hands-on approach to editing. He not only tries to make every attempt to trim the fat on a struggling title, but at the same time digs deep into what makes a character tick, almost to the point where he literally psychoanalyzes a character. Alonso then goes through what he refers to as a rigorous "casting process" to find a creative team who he feels would be best to handle the character he's discovered.

"In my mind, a murderous, rampaging Hulk leads to an inevitable place on the horizon, and you can't do that in a monthly," says Alonso. "The monthly's compelled by a sense of compassion you have for the character, and you lose that compassion if Banner is turning into a green monster and killing people all the time."

Alonso's editing process also includes a rather controversial step that even he admits can have its occasional pitfalls—he makes sincere friendships with the creators he works with and builds trust. However, the process seems to work, as some of the best ideas he's had—*X-Force* for example—have come from simply having a few beers with a writer or an artist who he's chosen to take over a title.


"One thing I've begun to realize about Spider-Man [is that he's] the perfect lapsed Catholic, because he's this guy who has this original sin that resulted in the death of [a] loved one and he'll never atone for it."
—Axel Alonso

"I knew sh-- about the X-Men and... was actually terrified when they gave me the book, but it just so happened that Peter Milligan was in town and we got drunk and he owed me a favor," remembers Alonso. "Out of that came a way to ask questions like, 'How can we do an X-book we're proud of and where we're actually saying something?'"

However, *X-Force* just wouldn't be a trademark Axel Alonso title if he didn't get into the trenches and help shape the revamp.

"Axel's been an integral part of the creative process and has initi-

...ast of ideas," says *X-Force* penciler Allred. "Like was Axel's idea. ...e said he had an idea for a Dennis Rodman-style character and from ...ere Peter and I threw our bits in and out came the character."

When asked what his proudest achievement at Marvel has ...en so far, Axel refuses to state just one title or one newfound ...ation, but it isn't difficult to notice how he lights up when ... mentioned *X-Force* was a sinking ... explains Alonso ...he greatest joy

**USE THE "FORCE."** Alonso admits one of his proudest achievements is guiding the successful revamp of *X-Force* (above).

about *X-Force* is the fact that as a top 20 book. I never would have expected that in my wildest dreams. I view it as a creator-owned ...disguised as an *X-Men* book."

Yet Alonso's biggest trial by fire came when Jemas and Marvel ...Chief Joe Quesada gave him the responsibility of a life-... revamping the Spider-Man line. Despite what should be a ... editor's dream job, Alonso met the Spider-Man line with nei... eagerness of *Incredible Hulk* nor an *X-Force*-like trepidation. ...wouldn't say Spider-Man was a particular favorite of mine," admits Alonso. "I tended to gravitate toward characters who didn... wear spandex. figured if I could do anything, it would have to be stuff based on reality. Stuff you read in papers."

Once again, it was up to Alonso to take a gamble. But rather than revitalize the character, he decided in Spider-Man's case, more was better. Alonso added a monthly anthology, *Tangled Web*, which offered underground and newfound talent a chance to write Spidey. He also put several Spider-Man one-shots, with talent ranging from Greg Rucka to Peter Bagge, into the hands of fans.

Yet when he's asked about his role in the recent success of Spider-Man comics, Alonso immediately gives credit where he feels credit is due.

"I think I've done my job," states Alonso. "The lion's share of the success, I feel, goes to Straczynski and John Romita Jr. They're the guys who did it. My role is for the book to continue to build steam through other books, be it *Tangled Web* or *Peter Parker: Spider-Man*. That's just me doing my job. The key players were JMS and Romita."

After a year of unprecedented success for Marvel's resident web-head, be it the multi-million dollar summer blockbuster or that fact that two of comics' most prolific writers—Kevin Smith and Straczynski—now write monthly Spider-Man series, Alonso has admittedly "geeked out" on Spidey. However, Alonso's newfound love for the character has absolutely nothing to do with Spider-Man's resurgence in popularity, but rather, Alonso's appreciation is a borderline religious one.

"One thing I've begun to realize about Spider-Man [is he's] the perfect lapsed Catholic, because he's this guy who has this original sin that resulted in the death of a loved one and he'll never atone for it," relates Alonso. "He's driven by very different things than Captain America or Superman, and I think in that regard, I find it easier to relate to him."

Yet Alonso can't escape the fact he edits the most popular comic book character in the world right now, and loves the reaction he gets when the everyday person on the street discovers that.

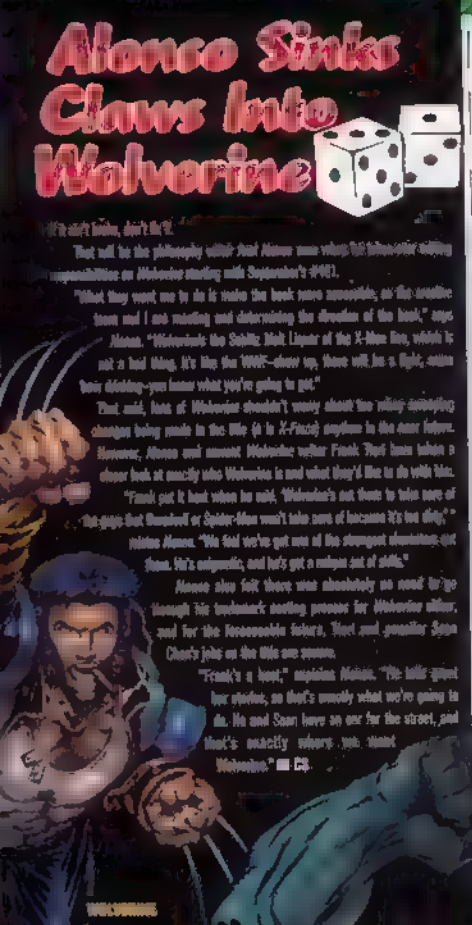
"I've seen the way Spider-Man resonates out there in the real world," says Alonso with a smile. "I've seen guys I play basketball with get all excited about Spider-Man when they find out I edit him. I've seen little kids geek out on Spider-Man. Out of that, I've really begun to develop an affection for him that never thought I would have."

**If it weren't for marijuana,** Alonso would have never gotten his break into comics.

Granted, Alonso's no dreadlocked, pro-hemp, Grateful Dead fan; he's quite the opposite, actually (although his mellow demeanor would have you think otherwise). Rather, the editor got his start as a journalist and had written an exposé on the Cannabis leaf in hip-hop culture that got the attention of former DC/Vertigo editor Lou Stathis.

"In late 1994 saw an ad in *The New York Times* for a DC Comics hiring, and basically thought, 'What the hell, I'll check it out,'" reminisces Alonso. "I interviewed with Lou Stathis, who was an editor at Vertigo at the time. Lou had worked at *High Times* magazine, and remembered the article I'd written. So he called me and said, 'You're the guy who wrote that, I want to meet you.' So we talked and he didn't even ask me any questions. Then he offered me the job, and

# Alonso Sinks Claws Into Wolverine



It's not broke, don't fix it.

That will be the philosophy under Axel Alonso when he takes editorial responsibilities on Wolverine starting with September's #901.

"What they want me to do is make the book more accessible, as the creative team and I are meeting and determining the direction of the book," says Alonso. "Historically the Sabretooth/Lynx of the X-Men line, which is not a bad thing. It's like the WWF—cheer up, there will be a fight, some boo-birdying—you know what you're going to get."

That said, fans of Wolverine shouldn't worry about too many outrageous changes being made to the title (it is *X-Force*) anytime in the near future. However, Alonso said assistant Wolverine editor Frank Pont have taken a closer look at exactly who Wolverine is and what they'd like to do with him.

"Frank got it best when he said, 'Wolverine's not there to take care of the guys that Daredevil or Spider-Man won't take care of because it's too dirty,'" relates Alonso. "We feel we've got one of the strongest characters out there. He's antiheroic, and he's got a unique set of skills."

Alonso also felt there was absolutely no need to go through his trademark meeting process for Wolverine editor, and for the foreseeable future, Pont and penciller Simon Coleby join on the title as regulars.

"Frank's a lock," explains Alonso. "He tells great bar stories, so that's usually what we're going to do. He and Sean have an ear for the street, and that's exactly where you want Wolverine." **W!** CB

Ennis pitched a new series titled *Preacher*

"I hired [Ennis] for *Unknown Soldier*, and *Preacher* was later approved and got rolling," remembers Alonso. "Scott Moore, who was the editor on *Preacher* for the first few issues, wound up moving over to the [now-defunct] Helix [line]; they had to decide who would take over his books, and since I had a relationship with Garth and he liked working with me, I inherited his books."

With the critically acclaimed *Preacher* and various other books edited while at Vertigo, Alonso came into his element and began to carve his niche for fans of edgy, adult-theme comics. Soon, he met another up-and-coming writer named Brian Azzarello who was pitching a new series titled *100 Bullets*, a series which Alonso reference "one of the books I've edited that I'm most proud of.

"When I finally met him we got along right off the bat," says Azzarello. "He struck me as a real stand-up guy right from the get go. A real conscientious guy."

With a knack for discovering ground-breaking talent and pitching titles unique to anything else on the comic shelves, Alonso had got the attention of Quesada and Jemas, who were looking to breathe new life into Marvel.

"I always seemed that Joe was working with someone that was working with at the time," explains Alonso. "So I knew who he was, but I had never met him. I knew he was a stand-up guy."

Once again, Alonso's reputation preceded him, and Quesada saw a potential in Alonso as a superhero editor the likes of which he'd never seen previously. Now that he's been a fixture at Marvel for almost two years, Quesada has begun to realize just how invaluable Axel is to the new Marvel.

"It's very obvious that Axel, like [legendary Batman group editor] Archie Goodwin, will be seen as one of the greatest editors who didn't just work in this business, but helped redefine what books are," remarks Quesada. "Archie was one of the guys who redefined comics in the '70s and I think Axel's doing very much the same thing today."

When [illegible] comes to an overall philosophy on the [illegible] concept—look at comics like the average guy on the street.

"A lot of people believe superhero comics bankrupt have lost track with the average guy on the street, explains Alonso. "The average guy on the street doesn't think comics are bankrupt. They just want to be entertained."

And it's that philosophy of entertaining the average guy that Alonso will take with him when media titles bombarded with Spider-Man happens at every with next summer's Lee-directed" movie

that was that really."

Tragically, Stathis was stricken with inoperable brain cancer and died shortly thereafter. Alonso then moved into his desk and was given all of Stathis' projects he'd been working on.

"The first projects I did were *Unknown Soldier* and *Weird War Tales*," recalls Alonso. "The thing for me was, I wanted to do reality-based, mature readers comic books that did not have a supernatural edge to them, and at the time, Vertigo was clearly known as a supernatural, dark fantasy line. I could give a sh-- about the unicorn books, and I know nothing about magic, so I couldn't do that."

Alonso would soon get a break from the "unicorn books" when a little-known writer by the name of Garth

**HULK SMASH!** Under Alonso's wise guidance, *The Incredible Hulk* has climbed the sales charts.

ALL STARS Indie Cage (shown) appearance of the enemy Alonso has put him through.

# From Lame to Fame

...6 movie. After conducting interviews with a range of media outlets from Sport magazine to the BBC, Alonso feels he's prepared ...and two

...m having a pair of purple pants made for the interviews.

...eams of comics to look forward to, he plans to parlay the game plan he had for Spider-Man into the Hulk.

"The way I look at it, we should offer more with the Hulk," hints ... I'd certainly like to make sure that Bruce Jones has more ...one thing ready to compliment the monthly. There're a cou... writers of note who have expressed interest in doing something that'll come out concurrent with the movie. If Peter ... were willing, I'd be interested in having her remind readers ...r contributions to the Hulk.

While editing and planning the future of such Marvel stapes as the Hulk, Spider-Man and, starting in September, Wolverine ...Sepan may be a dream job for most comic fans, what Alonso ...s the most has to be scouting new talent and turning them into the next wave of comic book superstars. Among his most promising ...ts are Wells, Leandro Fernandez and Daniel Way.

...Leandro's] penciling a *Tombstone* story for me... notes ...nso. "He's a former assistant to (*'00 Bullets* penciler) Eduardo ... and I think he's gonna really turn some heads over the ...t year. I think Zeb is a hoot, he's young and I think has potential tremendous. Daniel, who's going to be writing a *Deathlok* ...ies for me as well as a *Tangled Web* with Leandro, has a very unique voice. He's nailed the dirty white boy role and I ...'re ...k me up.

While Alonso has made his predictions about future ...there're still a few established creators he'd like to work with ...Marvel projects. Not just albeit a little surprising, would definitely solidify his place in comics lore as a creator who ...chances and who held a strong desire to push the medium to ...new level.

The Hernandez brothers (*Love & Rockets*), Gilberto and ...amie, are for me perhaps the creators who have the most overlap with in terms of sensibility," explains Alonso. "The likelihood of us working together is largely determined by the fact they have in Marvel and superhero comics. I really like Daniel Clowes (*Ghost World*) work as well.

So could we be seeing a *Tangled Web* mini-series written by Los Bros. Hernandez or an *Incredible Hulk* one-shot written by Clowes sometime in the near future? Sounds like a longshot.

And Axel Alonso wouldn't have it any other way.

**DAZZLER**

"The roller disco thing leaves large, brown-y gray angle pockets. I can myself trying to introduce Ezra Burkin (*Milk & Cheese*) to write it, I can see him really killing it. I know me with a character like that. Maybe some sort of 'Behind the Music' exposé. I think I might give Ezra a call about this." (*EDITOR'S NOTE: Alonso picked up the phone seconds after this interview and pitched Burkin on the idea.*)

**SPIDER-MAN 2099**

"I'm not sure the time is ripe for the return of 2099. There would definitely be room for special appearances by Miles Morales and Nick Fury, that's for sure."

**SPIDER-WOMAN**

"I don't know enough about the split of the old Agents of Atlas to know if anyone would be interested in taking on another Spider-Man title."

**SHE-HULK** (Virgin)

"Not that Mark is gone, I'm not here to make any ... an editor he couldn't relate."

**PETER PORKER: SPIDER-HAM**

"Zeb Wells immediately comes to mind. ... to take it down serious, ... I've got a lot of requests for ... comic that unfortunately ... would be cool again. I think Will would give it the additional kookiness that we really want with a character like that. My pitch: Will."

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# WAR

## With fists flailin', feet flyin' and swords swingin', WIZARD spotlights five samurai titles that'll make you a martial arts master

If you're looking for a brand-new way to get your kicks outta comics, give the martial arts a try.

Take a good look at the racks of your local comic shop; you may be missing some of the most engaging, high-octane and bloody good titles around. But you won't be seeing any colorful capes and cowls on these heroes; our martial arts masters merely do their job, take a bow and move on to the next adventure.

Martial arts titles—and books starring samurai in particular—have taken hold of readers like a ninja death clutch. But why the sudden proliferation of such books? Simply put, a samurai's job is to be a selfless hero, conducting oneself according to the centuries-old beliefs of the bushido, or "way of the samurai," their code of behavior and chivalry.

"I think, in America, we lack a deep culture," explains Michael Avon Oeming, co-creator of Image Comics' *Bastard Samurai*. "We have it, but it's not very old, and it's based on traditions and patriotism rather than honor. And if you look, we really glorify that aspect in our entertainment. That's what people love about 'The Sopranos.' Those characters make a promise to God and to the family to die if necessary. That's what a samurai's life is like all the time."

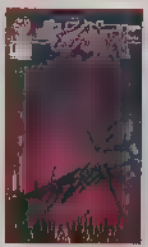
And ask any fanboy why they read comics, and nine outta 10 will tell you it's because they wanna see great action mixed with a solid story and a likable, capable hero.

That and beheadings—lots of beheadings.

So before you get annoyed and go committing seppuku (that's the ritual disembowelment samurai perform on themselves as penance for being dishonorable), check out these five samurai/martial arts titles available now that will surely leave you flat on your back like a roundhouse kick to the head! And we even rank 'em for you, based on action, historical accuracy and overall coolness!

by **Andy Serwin**

# THE PATH (CrossGen Comics)



CREDITS Ron Marz (story), Bart Sears (pencils), Mark Pennington (inks), Michael Atiyeh (colors)

PREMISE When "false gods" kill the warlord Todosi, his brother Obo-San uses a powerful weapon (and his Sigil insignia) to drive the beings away. At Todosi's funeral, the Emperor Mitsumune orders Obo-San to turn the weapon over so he can defeat the rival nation of Shinacea. When he refuses, Mitsumune becomes enraged and orders him to commit ritual suicide for his blasphemy and dishonor. Obo-San naturally rejects, escaping with the help of two other warriors, Ako and Wulf. But now, all three are running from a mad emperor, who has the powers of the CrossGen Sigil making him all-powerful!

WHY YOU SHOULD DREAD IT Weaving a pulse-pounding tale of revenge, *The Path* features stunning artwork by Sears, who's adopted a heavy, shadowy style that suits the brooding mood of Obo-San. "Being a samurai drama, it's supposed to look dirty, gritty and brutal," remarks Sears. "It needed grit, and the way I'm drawing it, mixed with Mark's inks, really gives it that feeling."

ORIGINAL "One of the reasons fans enjoy the samurai character is because these stories have an Old West appeal," explains series writer Marz. "You know the heroes and villains right away. But instead of six-guns, you've got swordplay. The themes of duty and honor make them a prototypical hero, but there's a lot of internal conflict that springs from that, making the characters much deeper."

MOST JAW-DROPPING DEATH SCENE At one point in issue #2, the mad Emperor Mitsumune seems to undergo a moment of clarity and decides to commit ritual suicide. Over the course of the next 16 brutal panels on a double-page spread, Mitsumune performs the excruciating act of disemboweling himself before his second decapitates him. Two pages later, Mitsumune's headless corpse rises from the ground, replaces his head and pulls the sword from his abdomen, all the while sporting a ghastly smile!

YOU TALKIN' TO ME? *The Path*'s Todosi is a truly imposing warrior thanks to the ceremonial garb designed by artist Bart Sears.

# BASTARD SAMURAI (Image Comics)

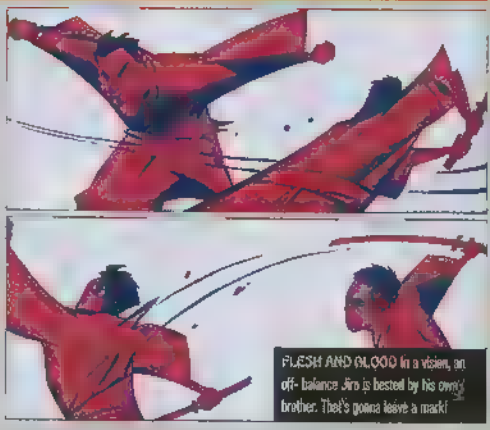
CREDITS Michael Avon Oeming (concept, story, inks), Miles Gunter (concept, story), Kelsey Shannon (concept, pencils, colors)

PREMISE Taking place in present-day New York City, *Bastard Samurai*—a bimonthly, three-issue mini-series—stars Jiro, top swordsman at the Kozu Sword School. But the school's methods leave much to be desired—it takes in street orphans, training them to fight in death matches! Jiro's allowed to live a somewhat normal lifestyle, but he's constantly spied upon by his masters. Nearing graduation, Jiro has a vision that drastically changes the course of his bloody existence, embarking him on a path of righteousness.

WHY YOU SHOULD DREAD IT Melding two completely different cultures—the samurai teachings of feudal Japan and the high-energy edginess of New York City—really gets our blood pumping. Imagine the school's dojo on top of a 50-story high rise, and you get the idea of what the visuals convey ("In its most primitive form, it's 'Fight Club meets samurai stuff,' quips Oeming.) *Bastard Samurai* sustains a bombardment of colorful images, and the action's paced faster than the killing stroke of a master swordsman.

ORIGINAL "This project came about because I wanted guys fighting on rooftops with swords in the modern day," notes Oeming. "I wanted to avoid samurai conventions, so we focused on the fact that Jiro's not a true samurai. He wasn't taught the finer points of *bushido* [samurai code]. Hence, he's a bastard samurai. One day, he has an epiphany and realizes he's got to change all that."

FAVORITE SCENE OF EAST MEETS WEST In issue #1, Jiro eats sushi off the stomach of a naked American prostitute, and during their horizontal mambo, he plays films by legendary Japanese director Akira Kurosawa ("The Seven Samurai") for background noise! (We just usually think about baseball when we get with the ladies.)



FLESH AND BLOOD In a vision, an off-balance Jiro is bested by his own brother. That's gonna leave a mark!

# LONE WOLF AND CUB

(Dark Horse Comics)

[illegible] Kazuo Koike (story), Goseki Kojima (art)

[illegible] in Japan during the 1600s Ittō Ogami works as a royally appointed executioner in Edo. But following his wife's death at the hands of the Yagyu clan, Ogami severs all ties to the *bushido* and adopts the *meifumado*—the assassin's road to Hell! Hoping to earn enough money as a killer for hire to get revenge on the Yagyu clan, Ogami takes different jobs while wandering the Japanese countryside with his three-year-old son Daigoro, helping him on his quest.

[illegible] Simply put, *Lone Wolf and Cub* stands as one of the best examples of comic book storytelling ever produced. Imagine all the reasons you dig comics and you'll find them in *Lone Wolf and Cub*, a book that originated over 30 years ago. You want a Wolverine-esque, tough-as-nails hero with a moral code all his own? You've got Lone Wolf. Want all the elements to be together, with vastly disparate characters coming and going, just like you read in *100 Bullets*? Read Lone Wolf. Wanna see action that'll blow your mind away, like you get in *New X-Men*? Buy Lone Wolf!

[illegible] "*Lone Wolf and Cub* stands as one of the all-time great masterpieces of comic literature," expounds Grendel creator Matt Wagner, a huge fan of the classic manga series. "It's an epic adventure that defies the limitations of genre or labels. It's got an iconic resonance as strong as anything ever produced in the medium. A must-have for any serious comic library."

[illegible] A group of samurai hires Lone Wolf to kill the living Buddha that resides in their village, hoping to make the town easier to run. But Lone Wolf faces serious doubt whether one can actually kill a Buddha. And the doubts only grow stronger after Lone Wolf delivers a killing blow that seems only to knock off the Buddha's headpiece. The Buddha even asks, "Is this not good? He who perfects his path! Is this not good? The gateless barrier!" before his head—followed by his entire body—splits in half down the middle in a tremendous fountain of blood and gore! (*Lone Wolf and Cub* Vol. 2: *The Gateless Barrier*)

Lone Wolf would've nabbed a perfect score, but those tiny digest collections strain our eyes!)

# USAGI YOJIMBO (Dark Horse Comics)

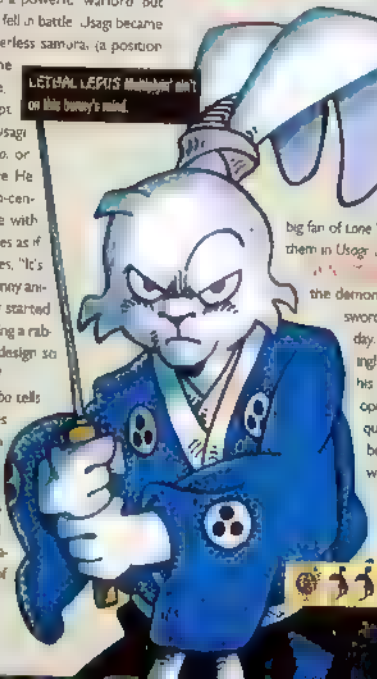
[illegible] Stan Sakai (concept, story, art)

[illegible] Miyamoto Usagi worked as the head samurai to a powerful warlord but when his master fell in battle, Usagi became a *ronin*, or masterless samurai (a position that carries some degree of shame). Rather than adopt a new master, Usagi became a *yojimbo*, or bodyguard for hire. He currently wanders the countryside of 17th-century Japan, getting in and out of trouble with friends, rivals and downright bitter enemies as if carried by the winds. As Sakai himself jokes, "It's historical samurai fiction dressed up with funny animals." Why funny animals? Usagi actually started out human, but one day, Sakai was sketching a rabbit with his ears tied up. He loved the design so much he switched everything to critters!

[illegible] *Usagi Yojimbo* tells some of the best action-adventure stories around. Just because he's a third cousin removed from your favorite Warner Bros. and Disney characters doesn't mean Usagi can't bring the pain, he's as tough as Batman or Wolverine. Take Sakai's acclaimed "Grasscutter" saga for example: The story features a furious naval battle with hundreds of ships and tooth-and-nail combat, a battle against a demon and the deaths of hundreds of swordsmen.

[illegible] grew up in Hawaii, which has a huge Asian population, relates Sakai, explaining the influences on *Usagi*. "Down the street from me was a theater that showed samurai movies every Saturday. I loved those films! And I've been a huge fan of *Lone Wolf and Cub* for years. It's just terrific storytelling with great gripping characters." (Sakai's such a big fan of *Lone Wolf*, he even created an homage to them in *Usagi*: Lone Goat and Kid!)

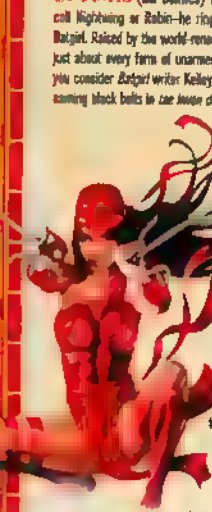
[illegible] During a battle with the demon Jei over the mystical Grasscutter sword, it's up to a battered Usagi to save the day, but the demon's capable of soul-stealing! However, Jei's attention is diverted by his young niece Keiko giving Usagi an opening, in the midst of a terrible earthquake. Usagi screams out, "Monster!" before hammering home his fatal blow with a mighty sound effect—"SHOONK!" Usagi dispatches the demon, releasing all the souls Jei's collected. (*Usagi Yojimbo* vol. 3 #21)



# QUICK KICKS

**Hey, if you get a kick outta martial arts books, be sure to check out these other high-flying titles!**

**BATGIRL** (DC Comics) When Batman wants a real workout, he doesn't call Nightwing or Robin—he rings up the deadliest member of the Bat-family, Batgirl. Raised by the world-renowned assassin David Cain, Batgirl is an expert in just about every form of unarmed combat imaginable—which makes sense, when you consider *Batgirl* writer Kelley Puckett is a former martial arts master himself, earning black belts in *tae kwon do* and *tai chi chuan*!



**ELEKTRA** (MAX/Marvel Comics, left) Daredevil's former girlfriend's making a name for herself as the deadliest assassin in the Marvel Universe. Elektra has mastered the deadly arts of *ninjitsu* (that means she's a ninja), and even has mind-whammy powers like a Jedi! And who knows when her old ninja foes The Hand will resurface?

**G.I. JOE** (Image) The Real American Heroes feature a slew of ninja operatives, not the least of which is the team's most popular (and deadliest) member Snake-Eyes! Plus, he'll be doing battle with his brother-in-arms Storm Shadow, a deadly martial artist now working for Cobra!

**IRON FIST** (Marvel) A feature film starring Rey Park (Toad in "X-Men") is in the works, and Marvel has several pitches for a new title when the flick hits theaters. And as for his pal White Tiger, Marvel has no plans for Hector Ayala or his Sons of the Tiger brethren.

**KABUKI** (Image) Pick up any of David Mack's *Kabuki* collections, especially the exceptional *Circle of Blood* TPB, to get an in-depth look at how martial arts may evolve in the near-future. The assassin Kabuki combines elements of classical martial arts with high-tech upgrades to increase the kill ratio. Poetic, challenging, entertaining and thought-provoking, *Kabuki* presents the author—but sometimes deadlier—side of the martial arts.

**LEGION** (DC Comics) When *Legion* scribes Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning bring back Karate Kid to the team—no plans yet, but it's only a matter of time—expect some major league martial arts action outta the toughest fighter in the 31st century!

**MASTER OF KUNG FU** (MAX/Marvel Comics) A brand-new six-issue mini-series starring Shang-Chi, Master of Kung Fu flies into stores this fall! Created by former *MOKF* collaborators Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy (with Jimmy Palmiotti joining the crew as inker), this new series sees Shang-Chi trying to enjoy his retirement from the espionage game, but, according to project editor Axel Alonso, "He's wooed back into the game, and he's got ample reason to get back." Could that reason be the return of his father, the deadly criminal warlord called Fu Manchu?

**TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES** (Mirage Studios) The Heroes in a Halfshell hand out mega-butt whoppins in their brand-new series from co-creator Peter Laird! The Turtles are ninjas for sure' out loud, so expect plenty of high-flyin' martial arts action as every ish!

**WAY OF THE RAT** (Crossfire) Chuck Dixon (*Nightwing* and *Birds of Prey*) brings his considerable talent for action to the Sigil Universe in *Way of the Rat*, a young thief named Boon Sai Hong steals a mystical object of great power that's coveted by the corrupt Judge K'ale. Combining the high-flying chaos of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" with the street-level grit of a John Woo flick, *Way of the Rat* even stars a grumpy talking monkey! Yay—monkeys! ■ AS

# BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

**(Dark Horse Comics)**

**CREDITS** Hiroaki Samura (art and story), Studio Proteus (U.S. production)

**PREMISE** Working for an unscrupulous lord in feudal Japan, a samurai named Manji learns the evil his master has committed and slays him. On the run for murder Manji meets an 800-year old woman named Yaobikuni who offers him immortality. He accepts, but in order to eventually die, Manji must kill 1,000 evil men, a mission he yearns to complete but despises at the same time, because let's face it, no matter how bloodthirsty an individual, killing 1,000 people will grow on your conscience after awhile.

**WHY YOU SHOULD READ IT** Aside from the bloodthirsty premise, *Blade of the Immortal* also serves up plenty of punk attitude thanks to its contemporary dialogue (American readers will certainly recognize the profanity!) and high-octane action. Think of the nihilistic flavor of anime like "Ninja Scroll" and "Akira" mixed with the poetry and elegance of Akira Kurasawa's "The Seven Samurai."

**QUOTABLE** When asked about the balls-out action of *Blade of the Immortal*, series editor Tim Ervin-Gore answers, "A restful period for the monthly *Blade of the Immortal* readers means a sword battle that lasts three issues and drains enough blood to keep a family of vampires alive for a year."

KILLING TIME: With the task of killing 1,000 evil-doers at hand, Manji wears the "badge of honor" easily.

**BEST CURE FOR A HEADACHE** Manji's faring pretty well against a trio of highwaymen, but during the battle, he gets a rude awakening when one of the swordsmen stabs him through the back of his skull—and leaves the sword there! But being immortal, Manji doesn't die, he just stands up—with a full-length sword poking through his head—and jokes, "Been a long time...ages since somebody punched a hole through the old brain pan... eyesight's sort of cloudy, but...doesn't hurt as much as a stab through the guts. Weird, huh?" (*Blade of the Immortal The Gathering* #3)

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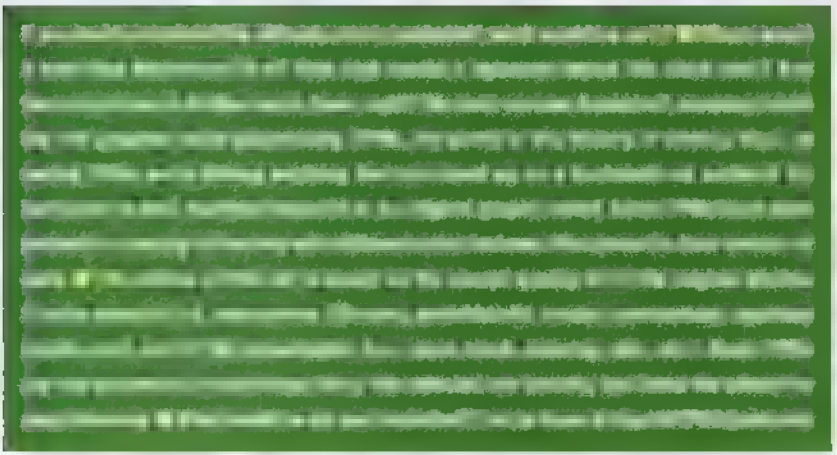
*Wizard Associate Editor And*
*sword, but his mastery of the*

WIZARD FILLS ITS BOOKSHELVES WITH THE...

# TOP 100

## TRADE PAPERBACKS OF ALL TIME

BY THE WIZARD STAFF



## 100. BATMAN: FACES (DC softcover)

comics, but also in real life.

## 98. THE RED STAR

thanks to its computer-generated graphics, and this tabloid-sized TPB even lists

team. All in all, everything you'd want out of the X-Men can be found here—all without any

## 96. BATMAN: RED RAIN

Blood stains the streets of Gotham, in this noir-ish Elseworlds graphic novel by Doug

## 97 SPIDER-MAN VS. VENOM

## 94. BATMAN: HAUNTED KNIGHT

impossible—makes the Mad Hatter cool!

## 95. THE COMPLETE CONCRETE

chance to check out *Concrete* creator Paul Chadwick's gorgeous art, which resembles a cross between Mike Allred and Jack Kirby

## 93. THE ADVENTURES OF TONY MILLIONAIRE'S SOCK MONKEY (Dark Horse softcover)

checking out.

## 95. X-MEN: FROM THE ASHES

## 92. CEREBUS VOL. 2: HIGH SOCIETY

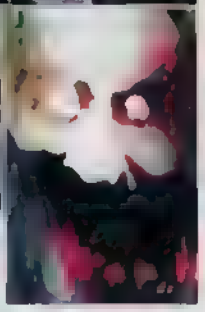
ng of politics, greed, graft, corruption, kidneyots and the whole democratic process, *Society* sets the table for the rest of *Cerebus*' 300-issue opus. "When he was on his mark," says *Spider-Man: Blue* artist Tim Sale, "Sim was as good and pure as comics get." *Check out all 14 meaty Cerebus TPBs (they're nicknamed "phone books" for a reason): Vol. 1: Cerebus; Vol. 3: Church and State Book 1, Vol. 4: Church and State Book 2, Vol. 5: Jaka's Story, Vol. 6: Melmoth, Vol. 7: Flight, Vol. 8: Women, Vol. 9: Reads, Vol. 10: Minds, Vol. 11: Guys, Vol. 12: Rick's Story, Vol. 13: Going Home and Vol. 14: Form and Void.*

1. *Absolute Flash Vol. 1: Dark Flash*
2. *Nightwing Vol. 4*
3. *Incredible Hulk: Ground Zero*
4. *Batman: Arkham Asylum*

## 91. WOLVERINE: BLOODY BEAST

(Marvel softcover)

He's the best there is at what he does. But is that enough when Wolverine finds himself plunged headfirst into a battle between two warring factions of the Japanese mafia? It may not be, as readers witness Wolvie getting shot in the face, speared in the back, perforated by assault rifles and burnt to a crisp in one of the most fun rides the furry mutant's ever been on. Written and illustrated by Steve Skroce, who knows a thing or three about high-octane, martial arts frenzy as storyboard artist of "The Matrix."



## 90. AMERICAN FLAGG! VOL. 1: HARD TIMES

(First/Graphitti Designs hardcover)

Welcome to America, circa 2031. People have fled decaying inner cities and now live in shopping malls, while the phone company owns the U.S. government and reconstructs sexual mores out of control. That's *American Flagg!*, Howard Chaykin's disturbed vision of America's future. Out-of-work actor Reuben Flagg signs on as a "Plexus Ranger," a cop protecting the Chicago Plexmall. Flagg's first mission is to stop weekly gang rampages...all while indulging in a bit of that recreational sex himself. "*Flagg!* blew the roof off comics," says Jeph Loeb. "The story was mature in its thinking—sexual satire mixed with great action." *Also: Vol. 2: Southern Comfort and Vol. 3: State of the Union.*

## 89. BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Madness runs rampant in Arkham Asylum, and Batman may be coming down with a fatal case. When the psychotic Joker leads a revolt of the inmates on April Fool's Day, it's up the Dark Knight to face the lunacy and save the hostages. But what happens when the ghost of Arkham's troubled founder, Amadeus Arkham, affects the Dark Knight? Writer Grant Morrison and artist Dave McKean craft a disturbing psychological tale of what makes Gotham's protector—and its terrors—tick. *Arkham* continues to inspire today's creators, like upcoming Bat-artist Jim Lee. "I'm trying to approach the Joker like how Dave McKean—who did the best Joker in recent memory—did. I want him to look really creepy."

## 88. INCREDIBLE HULK: GROUND ZERO

It begins with a blood-letting and ends with a nuclear detonation! *Ground Zero* spotlights not only the frenetic tale of the leader dropping a gamma bomb on a middle-American town, but boasts the single greatest Hulk/Wolverine slugfest EVER. "The fans thought it was pretty cool," says *Ground Zero* writer Peter David, "because it was the first time I redefined the Hulk's 'invulnerability' and said that it was a super-accelerated healing factor." Pushing each other past the brink of sanity, the two brawlers pummel and slice one another in a fracas whose spilt blood has never been rivaled, thanks to the ultra-detailed penciling of a young Todd McFarlane.

## 87. ULTIMATE X-MEN VOL. 1: THE [illegible] PEOPLE

(Marvel softcover)

Wolverine's an assassin for the Brotherhood? Magneto cr[illegible]

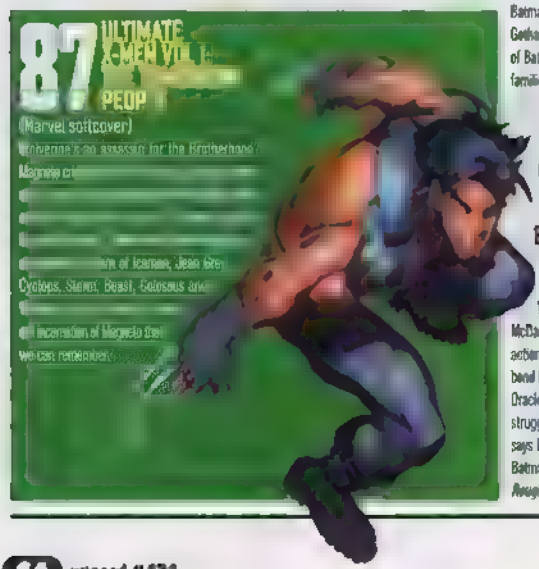
[illegible]

[illegible]m of Icarus; Jean bre[illegible]

Cyclops, Storm, Beast, Colossus and [illegible]

[illegible]ncination of Magneto the[illegible]

We can remember [illegible]



See below

## 86. BATMAN: DARK VICTORY

A little mystery plus a little history makes *Batman: Dark Victory* one of Tim Sale and Jeph Loeb's finest collaborations. The sequel to *Long Halloween* (see No. 76) sees Batman and Commissioner Gordon struggle with the investigation into Gotham City's Hangman killings. Their headaches multiply when a gang of Bat-Rogues, led by Two-Face, wage a war with the organized crime families of Gotham. All this chaos throws suspicion on everyone, including the Dark Knight, but when Batman takes on a new partner in Robin the Boy Wonder the case cracks wide open! *Dark Victory* not only puts a new spin on the early years of Batman and Robin's career, it illustrates just how important Robin is to the Bat-mythos and serves up some of Sale's best art ever.

## 85. NIGHTWING VOL. 4 (DC softcover)

Kiss Batman's shadow goodbye, Mr. Grayson. *A Darker Shade of Justice*, the fourth Nightwing trade, epitomizes the former Boy Wonder, nailed perfectly by creators Chuck Dixon and Scott McDaniel with their long run on the regular series. Featuring high-octane action, LOTS of cool villains, a Superman team-up that shows the deep bond between the two heroes AND the long-awaited hook-up of Dick and Oracle, this trade truly packs more dynamite for your dime. "We had struggled with initial accusations of 'Batman Jr.' and 'Batman Lite,'" says Dixon, "but we succeeded in giving Dick his own voice outside of Batman." *For further Nightwing reading, pick up A Knight in Bludhaven, Rough Justice and Love and Bullets.*

## 84. THE COFFIN (Oni Press softcover)

Dr. Ashar Ahmad didn't start living until after he died. A driven scientist but indifferent father, Ahmad invests years of his life to create a metal suit, called a "Coffin," that can house a person's soul after they die, in effect creating eternal life. When a 150-year-old billionaire wants the suit, he steals the technology and kills Ahmad, who manages to put his soul inside one. From there, *The Coffin* becomes a tale of revenge and redemption, as well as an exploration on life and the afterlife. Creepy, atmospheric artwork by Mike Huddleston nicely compliments a thought-provoking, entertaining premise by rookie writer Phil Hester (he penciller on Kevin Smith's *Green Arrow* run.

## 83. BATMAN/HUNTRESS: CRY FOR BLOOD (DC softcover)

Who would you rather have in your corner—Batman or the Question? For the Huntress, it's the latter since he's the only one convinced of her innocence after she's framed for murder by the Gotham mob. (Of course, nailing Batman with her crossbow doesn't help her argument much.) Greg Rucka and Rick Burchett craft a deft tale of honor and redemption in which the Huntress must consider a number of questions—and live with how she gets her answers. "Two superb storytellers at the top of their game," says former longtime Batman editor Denny O'Neil. "If Raymond Chandler would have done comics, they would have resembled this series."

## 82. GREEN LANTERN: EMERALD DAWN

## 81. OBERGEIST: DIRECTOR'S CUT (Image/Top Cow softcover)

For Nazi scientist Jürgen Steinholtz, death becomes him. After being killed by his own unholy experiments, Steinholtz is shown the error of his ways in the afterlife and resurrected as all-powerful being. He wakes up in the year 2147 where the U.S. is being torn apart by a neo-Nazis group intent on seceding from the nation. It's up to Steinholtz to redeem himself, thwart the Nazis and save the world in this haunting tale of redemption by Dan Jolley. Tony Harris and Ray Snyder. Extras include a newly colored story called "The Hidden Locket," new pages, sketches and creator commentary. Actor Bruce Campbell ("Evil Dead" trilogy) says in his introduction, "There is a perfect symmetry between the written word and the imagery . . these guys have it all."

## 80. CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS (DC softcover)

The most ambitious comic project ever could fill another volume with its body count. Marv Wolfman and George Pérez's *Crisis* aimed to clean up DC's cluttered 50-year-old continuity by merging the handful of its parallel Earths into one, but not before a being called the Anti-Monitor destroys an infinite amount of worlds in the process. This cover, penciled by Pérez and painted by Alex Ross, is easily one of the most beautiful ever produced and worth the purchase alone. "It was actually the first series I ever followed," says *JSA* writer Geoff Johns, who was 12 at the time. "For me, it really shaped the DCU. I doubt I would've read many DC comics before *Crisis*."

## 79. AVENGERS: ULTRON UNLIMITED (Marvel softcover)

The perfect killing machine has just received an upgrade, courtesy of creators Kurt Busiek and George Pérez. Ultron, one of the Avengers most powerful foes, returns with an appetite for destruction and holds the fate of mankind in his adamantium grip. After Ultron slaughters the small European country of Slorenia in under three hours, Earth's Mightiest Heroes must rally like never before in order to put a stop to this reawakened threat. But do they have what it takes to send this maniacal killing machine to the scrap heap once and for all?

## 78. JLA: EARTH 2 (DC softcover)

Meet the evil JLA. They're called the Crime Syndicate, and as a warm-up to their current *New X-Men* run, writer Grant Morrison and artist Frank Quitely remade Superman and Co. into a twisted mirror image more deranged and evil than anything the JLA's ever faced. The Syndicate reside on a parallel Earth where Benedict Arnold is on the dollar bill and Lex Luthor is its greatest hero. "The Crime Syndicate is a twisted, f—ed up look at the opposite of the World's Greatest Heroes," says *Flash* writer Geoff Johns. "The relationships between the Syndicate members, like Jiraman's jealousy over Superwoman, are truly unsettling. . . all in a good way."

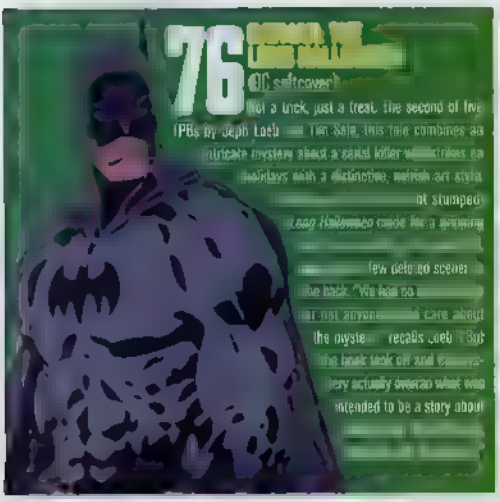
## 77. TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE COLLECTED BOOK VOL. 1 (Mirage Studios softcover)

This isn't no turtle 'toon. These are the grim, gritty tough-guy terrapins that starred in Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's original black-and-white indie sensation. This TPB from Mirage crams the first 15 issues of this extremely rare 1980s series into one massive edition. See if you can catch the riffs on Frank Miller's *Daredevil* run, the Fantastic Four and others. "*Ninja Turtles* captured my imagination in junior high," explains *G.I. Joe* writer Josh Blaylock. "Eastman and Laird made the Turtles feel like guys you'd hang out with. You *wanted* to go play video games and drink a soda with Michelangelo, y'knew?"

## 76. BATMAN: THE LONG HALLOWEEN

See next page.

1
2
1. Avengers: Ultron Unlimited; 2. The Coffin; 3. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Collected Book Vol. 1; 4. Crisis on Infinite Earths



## 76 [illegible] (DC softcover)

Not a trick, just a treat, the second of five TPBs by Jeph Loeb [illegible] Tim Sale, this time combines an intricate mystery about a serial killer [illegible] holidays with a distinctive, retro art style. It stumped [illegible] Halloween made for a surprising [illegible] few detective scenes [illegible] the book. "We had no [illegible] or real anyone [illegible] care about the psycho," recalls Loeb. "But the book took on and [illegible] very actually became what was intended to be a story about

## 75. DOOM PATROL: CRAWLING FROM THE WRECKAGE (DC softcover)

When the most out-there creator writes the most out-there heroes, expect the unexpected. Writer Grant Morrison's opening arc on the *Doom Patrol* series follows the now–and definitely twisted–members of the team as they take on the Scissormen, who literally cut people out of reality. Who else but Morrison could come up with a [illegible] with 64 different personalities, each with its own unique superpower?

## 74. WHITEOUT (Oni Press softcover)

"When you hit bottom, you can always start digging." That's the situation Federal Marshal Carrie Stetko finds herself in, as she's entangled in a murder mystery at the bottom of the world–the frozen wasteland of Antarctica. Writer Greg Rucka places the reader firmly in Carrie's snowshoes while artist Steve Lieber perfectly captures Antarctica's desolation and beauty in black and white. In *Whiteout*'s sequel *Melt*, [illegible] as widely as this book was. I first myself wishing that this was the standard of comics, not the exception."

## 73. PUNISHER: CIRCLE OF BLOOD [illegible]

How much violence can one man stomach? That's the question posed in this collection of the first *Punisher* mini-series by Steven Grant and Mike Zeck. Trapped in a constantly repeating "circle of blood"–death begets death–the Punisher rejects his rigid kill-all-criminals code. In *Circle of Blood*, he wants to wipe out organized crime once and for all because he's *tired* of the killing. Of course, starting a prison riot, kicking off a Mob war and taking down an illegal vigilante organization called The Trust calls for an awful lot of killing. But when he's betrayed by the people he once trusted, the story twists even more. "From his cranium nose to those broad shoulders, you can't touch Zeck's Punisher," exclaims Ed McGuinness (*ThunderCats*) "If I ever draw the character, the first thing I'd look at is his stuff from this book."

## 72. POWERS VOL. 1: WHO KILLED RETRO GIRL? (Image softcover)

Retro Girl, the City's most prominent superhero, has been murdered. The only clue: the phrase "Kaotic Chic" spray-painted on a wall behind her corpse. Now, it's up to homicide detectives Christian Walker and Deena Pilgrim to solve the case. But when your only leads boil down to either egotistical superheroes or uncooperative villains, solving a case can be next to impossible. Practically a third of this TPB by Brian Michael Bendis and Mike Avon Oeming contains extras, including character/concept sketches, original strips which appeared in *Comic Shop News* and the first issue's script for any aspiring comic writers. *Also: Vol. 2: Role Play*

## 71. GOLDFISH (Image softcover)

Before hitting it big with *Ultimate Spider-Man*, Brian Michael Bendis wrote and illustrated black-and-white crime noir books. His first hit, *Goldfish*, followed a young grifter working his biggest con: getting his son back from his ex-girlfriend, an underworld queen. "Under the ever-changing title of his own artwork, Brian's sense of pacing, dialogue and consequence [in *Goldfish*] all flourish with a crackling intensity," says *Green Arrow* cover artist Matt Wagner. "Grittier, but no less heartfelt, *Goldfish* and *Jinx* are what all you *Ultimate Spider-Man* readers should try when you're not so scared of black and white."

## 70. FORTUNE AND GLORY [illegible]

Truth is stranger than fiction. Just ask writer/artist Brian Michael Bendis, who trades in his usual edgy crime stories, seen in *Daredevil* and *Torso*, for the funnier side of *Fortune and Glory*. Here, Bendis recounts his absurd dealings with Hollywood execs as he negotiates to turn his comics into movie projects. "Few have been to Hollywood and back and lived to tell the tale," says Hollywood player and *JSA* writer Geoff Johns. "No one in L.A. will admit it, but *Fortune & Glory* captures the true Hollywood executive experience. 'Who owns the rights to Eliot Ness?' asks one exec. I don't know how Bendis kept a straight face."

## 69. WOLVERINE (Marvel softcover)

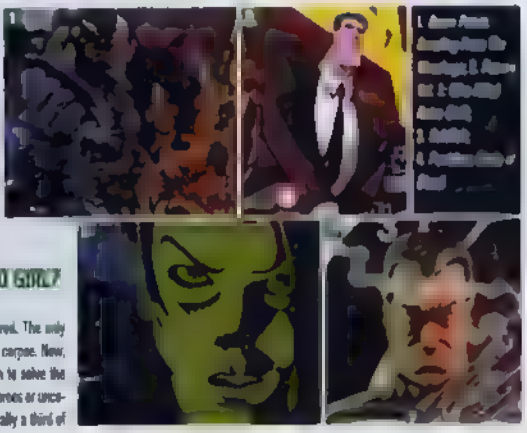
Assassins, ninjas and... wedding bells? Logan sees it all on this Far East adventure by comic legends Chris Claremont and Frank Miller. This mini-series toned down Wolverine's berserker image and beefed up Logan's role as a wayward samurai struggling to maintain his own code of honor. Here, Logan struggles to take out a Japanese mob lord who also happens to be his girlfriend's father. The story's cinematic style helped suck in readers such as *Lady Death* creator Brian Pulido. "It read like a movie," explains Pulido. "The story unraveled like a good detective story, but this was all out martial arts action."

## 68. CAPTAIN AMERICA: WAR AND REMEMBRANCE

See opposite right

## 67. DAREDEVIL: THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR (Marvel Deluxe hardcover)

Going blind looking for one hell of a DD collection? Feast your eyes on this hand-



1. Jinx: The Definitive Collection; 2. Daredevil: Man Without Fear; 3. Justice League: A New Beginning; 4. Silver Surfer: The Return of Thanos

## 63. JINX: THE DEFINITIVE COLLECTION

(Image softcover)

In one of his earliest and most acclaimed works, writer Brian Michael Bendis weaves a story of greed and betrayal. *Jinx* follows a female bounty hunter and two young con men on the hunt for $3 million. The story makes the grit of the street feel like its on your hands and keeps you turning page after page of this monster edition. Extras include sketches, the script for a proposed Jinx animated series and pinups galore. "Without *Jinx*, there wouldn't be an *Ultimate Spider-Man* or *Daredevil* by Bendis," says Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada. "His dialogue and pacing in early works like *Jinx* are what got him his gig at Marvel."

## 62. X-FORCE: A NEW REVOLUTION

(Marvel softcover)

Prepare to look at mutants in a whole new light. Whether it's U-Go Girl, the Orphan, Phat or Beak, there's not a normal looking one in the bunch. Which is all part of writer Peter Milligan's plan to skewer the idea of celebrity and its cutthroat exploitation, as each member is a pop star out for their own best interests. This TPB also gives a glimpse into artist Mike Allred's sketchbook of the freakish mutants he designed that were actually too weird to be included in the revamp. "When I saw Mike's sketches, I immediately thought, 'This is either going to be a massive hit, or I'm gonna get fired,'" says *X-Force* Editor Axel Alonso. "I guess part of me couldn't help but think, 'God help us, are the X-fans ready for this?'"

## 61. JUSTICE LEAGUE: A NEW BEGINNING

(DC softcover)

Funny superheroes are rarely done well. But when Keith Giffen, J.M. DeMatteis and Kevin Maguire revitalized the Justice League, nobody did it better. Their combination of snappy banter and hilarious facial expressions led to an instant hit for DC Readers chuckled at Guy Gardner's perpetual conflict with team leader Batman (a conflict that ends with one classic punch), Blue Beetle laughing out loud at his teammates and why Captain Marvel should be called Captain Whitebread.

## 60. INFINITY GAUNTLET

Even when he's a god, Thanos still can't get lucky with the ladies. Possessing the six Infinity Gems, Thanos gains omnipotence and kills half of the universe's population with the snap of his finger in an attempt to earn the affections of the mistress Death. A plethora of Marvel heroes mount a defensive to thwart the mad Titan, but how can you beat a god? Only writer Jim Starlin knew the answer. "It had a hundred characters and mindless destruction, but for all the bombast, it was really about



some hardcover collection of Frank Miller and John Romita Jr.'s gripping *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear* mini-series. Not only does it collect the Man Without Fear's revamped origin tale, but it includes extra features like an art gallery, creator transcripts and chapter breaks with Braille. "It was just awesome," says "The Matrix" storyboard artist Steve Skroce. "A great, well-paced story with awesome art. I like these 'before they became' stories, especially when they're done as well as this one."

## 66. AVENGERS: UNDER SIEGE

When an army of supervillains invades the home of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, expect carnage on a grand scale. The new Baron Zemo organizes a veritable horde for his new Masters of Evil and concocts a devious scheme to divide and conquer the Avengers. His plan slices through the team with maximum efficiency as the Masters destroy Avengers' Mansion, nearly kill Hercules and beat their butler James bloody before the good guys can even mount a counter-attack! This is one of the best Avengers stories of all time, courtesy of Roger Stern and John Buscema!

## 65. SILVER SURFER: THE RETURN OF THANOS

(Marvel softcover)

Wanna meet a bad mofo? Say hello to Thanos, a more twisted, manipulative bastard you'll never find. It's too bad the Silver Surfer learns that the hard way. In writer Jim Starlin's precursor to *The Infinity Gauntlet* (see No. 60), not only does Thanos promise to eradicate half the universe's population but he tricks the Surfer into helping him. "Yes, these are Surfer stories, but the real star is Thanos, who, for my money, is the among the best villains EVER," says *Sojourn* writer Ron Marz. "I learned the ropes watching Jim put these stories together. By the time he turned Silver Surfer over to me, I'd had pretty a damn good education."

## 64. X-MEN: GOD LOVES, MAN KILLS

(Marvel softcover)

In this X-Men story by Chris Claremont and Brent Anderson, the villains aren't Magneto, The Brotherhood or even Sentinels–it's us. In a story "X-Men" film director Bryan Singer calls his "favorite X-Men story," the story is about hate, pure and simple. It begins with the lynching of two mutant children, a scene so unsettling Singer's planning to incorporate the story into the plot for "X-Men 2" due out in May 2003. The team must face the Rev. William Stryker whose evangelism promotes fear and prejudice against mutants. With their backs against the wall, the X-Men are forced to do the unthinkable to save the mutant race: team up with arch-nemesis Magneto.

## 68.

(Marvel softcover)

1. *Dr. Strange/Dr. Doom: Triumph and Torment*; 2. *Animal Man*; 3. *Earth X*

a guy trying to impress a girl," says *Sojourn* writer Ron Marz. "Thomas' failure is ultimately one of unrequited love. Who can't relate to that?"

## 58. EARTH X (Marvel softcover)

It's up to Machine Man to save Earth. An unlikely scenario by co-writers Jim Krueger and Alex Ross, but cool nonetheless. In a future where all humans have manifested superpowers, true heroes are few and far between. With the Celestials preparing Earth's destruction, X-51 (Machine Man's original name) must convince the remaining heroes to fight for mankind's necessity. "The beauty of *Earth X* is that it combines the best aspects of all Marvel's eras," says "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" creator Joss Whedon in his introduction. "It has the dark complexity of the modern and the wide-eyed wonder of the early days." As an added bonus, the trade includes tons of sketches from Ross' original concept proposal!

## 58. JLA NEW WORLD ORDER

Rule #1: Don't screw with Batman. See, a merciless team of super-aliens called the Hyperclan has hit Earth, using mind control to conquer it and leveling out the JLA in the process. Believed dead, the Dark Knight sets out to free his teammates. See, only he knows the Hyperclan's true nature. ...and a tense "Die Hard"-style game of cat-and-mouse ensues in this great story by Grant Morrison and Howard Porter. "The story showcased both individual members and teamwork as they were pitted against a menace that I genuinely thought was frightening," says former *JLA* scribe Mark Waid. "I'd like to think that DC sends both Grant and editor Ruben Diaz a giant thank-you note every month."

## 57. DR. STRANGE/DR. DOOM

Dr Doom—a mama's boy? To free his mother's soul from Mephisto's clutches, Doom collects on a debt from a wary Dr. Strange. In this graphic novel by Roger Stern and Mike Mignola, The Sorcerer Supreme and the Latverian dictator (an accomplished sorcerer himself) descend into Hell, but find their uneasy alliance doesn't lead to prosperous teamwork. Doom's genius plan makes Strange—and even the reader—uneasy. In the end, Doom's gambit pays off, but at a cost so heavy, the reader can't help but give him what he craves: respect.

## 56. LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES: THE

In the 30th century, Darkseid's name is still whispered in hushed, fearful tones—he's a boogey man, a demon from Hell and an omnipotent tyrant, all rolled into one. And in this opus by Paul Levitz, Keith Giffen and Larry Mahlstedt, he's about to take over the universe—and the Legionnaires are helpless to stop him. After stealing various artifacts of power to boost his own energy levels, Darkseid enslaves the entire planet of Daxam—imagine three billion Supermans—and unleashes them on the galaxy. In the end, any victory gained by the Legion is negated by a horrible curse that affects them forever! Our biggest complaint about this trade: Darkseid's involvement remains a mystery until halfway through the story, yet the cover gives away the big surprise!

## 55. STRANGERS IN PARADISE VOL. 2 I DREAM OF YOU (Abstract Studio softcover)

"When people say romance comics are dead," says Kevin Smith, "I show this *SiP* graphic novel into their hands." This is no ordinary romance comic, though. Sure, there's the love triangle between Katchoo, Francine and David, but writer/artist Terry Moore's *SiP: I Dream of You* puts its readers through the wringer with raw suspense. When it's revealed that Katchoo used to be a call girl for an organized crime ring peddling influence in Washington, the political intrigue jumps off the scale. *Also: Vol. 1: The Collected SiP, Vol. 3: It's a Good Life, Vol. 4: Love Me Tender, Vol. 5: Immortal Enemies, Vol. 6: High School, Vol. 7: Sanctuary, Vol. 8: My Other Life, Vol. 9: Child of Rage, Vol. 10: Tropic of Desire.*

## 54. ANIMAL MAN (DC softcover)

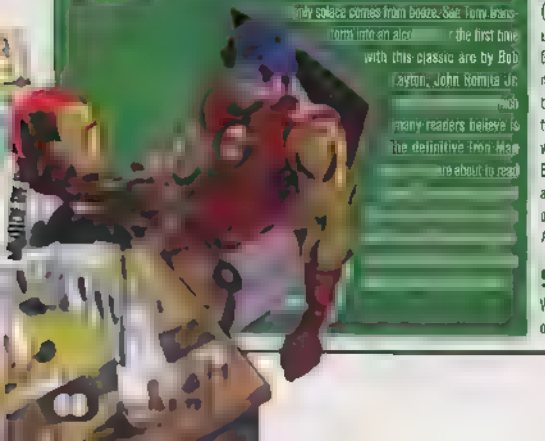
"The title started the trend of taking fairly lame characters and showing there are no bad stories—just stories told badly," remarks Jeph Loeb. Writer Grant Morrison developed a superhero we cared about. Buddy Baker, a reluctant hero who could absorb the abilities of animals, is also a lovable lox with a family who goes back into the superhero biz 'cuz his family needs the money. "Grant took an unknown character and grew a world around him that would eventually help populate the idea of the Vertigo Universe," adds Loeb. "It was, and still remains, a remarkable achievement."

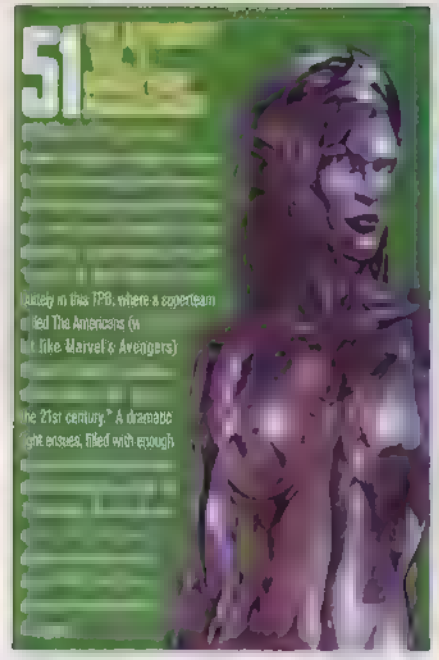
## 53. HELLBLAZER: DANGEROUS HABITS (DC softcover)

Looking for an effective anti-smoking campaign? Look no farther than Garth Ennis' *Hellblazer: Dangerous Habits*. When John Constantine is diagnosed with terminal lung cancer after a lifetime of puffing on cigarettes, the usually cool-as-a-cucumber con man becomes desperate, and turns to anyone—be it friend or foe—that might be able to cure him. However, while on the surface this book may seem like just another outrageous Ennis story, look just beneath and you'll find a lesson in life, death and above all else, the importance of friendship. Be sure to check out the other *Hellblazer* TPBs: *Original Sins, Damnation's Flame, Tainted Love, Fear and Loathing, Hard Time* (See No. 46) and *Good Intentions*.

## 52. BOX OFFICE POISON

When it comes to everyday life in New York City and what really goes on behind the scenes in the comic book industry, it doesn't get any


50
Tony Stark could
crew up more. As Iron Man, his armor mysterio
and has a foreign depositor
on TV. He gets his ass handed to him by
Ramps. His armor is impounded by the government. And on top of that, his
only solace comes from booze. Sad. Tony trans-
forms into an alco
the first time
with this classic are by Bob
Layton, John Romita Jr.
many readers believe is
The definitive Iron Man
are about to read



...lusively in this TPB, where a superteam ...alled The Americons (a bit like Marvel's Avengers) ...the 21st century." A dramatic ...ight ensues, filled with enough ...

...published in a beautiful, 600-page collection by Top Shelf Productions, can turn the most staunch, mainstream comic fan into an indie comic aficionado. "I loved the way Alex made his story of dreary jobs, comic books, love, sex and crusty old professionals one of the most delightful and whimsical books to hit stands in years," says Chris Staros, Top Shelf publisher. "Everyone who has read the graphic novel says the same thing, 'I couldn't put it down!' And that's saying something when it's a 608-page book!"

**51. THE AUTHORITY VOL. 2: UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT**

See above.

**50. THE POWER OF IRON MAN**

See opposite left.

**49. STORMWATCH VOL. 4: A FINER WORLD**
(WildStorm/DC softcover)

...crafted some brilliant stories during his run on the book (collected over five separate volumes), but the best by far is "A Finer World," featuring two mind-blowing tales. ...deep cover operatives pursuing their own agenda who StormWatch must bring in from the cold. If they can survive the showdown. The second story, "Bleed" sees the StormWatch team discovering a peephole into an alternate reality, but what they see—

*Also: Vol. 1: A Force of Nature, Vol. 2: Lightning Strikes, Vol. 3: Change or Die and Vol. 5: Final Orbit.*

**48. HELLBOY: THE CHOSEN**
CO...

Call him loud, call him gruff—just don't call him the Antichrist. He's Hellboy. Mike Mignola's paranormal investigator and this collection of short stories captures the guy perfectly. Particularly the title story, a Hellboy origin tale with one of the earliest scenes with Satan we've ever seen. Mignola bases his tales on real folklore like

# GREATEST STORIES NOT IN TPBS

...the first time around when *Ultimate X-Men* decides to reinterpret it. From *Uncanny X-Men* #125-#128, the X-Men are pushed to the limit as Dr. Moira MacTaggart's mutant son goes on a rampage, altering reality as he sees fit, all the while destroying human hosts to house his immense power. Only one X-Man can stop him—but to do so, it will cost him his very soul... A classic by Chris Claremont and John Byrne.

...*Days* [see #38] we'd like to see Moore's scattered DC stories from *Superman*, *DC Comics Presents* and others. Maybe even repackage the two-part *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow* (see No. 9) in here, too.

...everything DC collects, it hasn't collected Byrne's headline-making 1986 revamp of the regular series? Especially the three-part story where Supes must help save the Earth once inhabited by the "pre-Byrne" Superman where the Man of Steel must take the role of judge, jury and executioner.

...revamp of everyone's favorite Amazon princess. With stunning art and stronger ties to Greek mythology, Diana enters man's world for the first time, learning lessons the hard way.

...stopped just before Simonson's defining run kicked into high gear! See Thor confront the world-destroying Surtur (resulting in, among other huge ramifications, the destruction of the Rainbow Bridge!), struggle with Hela's scaring curse and transform into Thor the Thunder Frog (pulled off without looking stupid!).

...wrote and illustrated 64 issues of the series, and his entire run needs collecting. The run includes the best Dr. Doom stories of all time, a new member in She-Hulk and why Invisible Woman is the team's most powerful member.

**EL DIABLO** Writer Brian Azzarello rides herd on one helluva Western. When a sheriff carries a haunting secret, he must fight a ghostly figure and get caught in a twisted circle of revenge and redemption.

**LEGION LOST** In the 30th century, the Legion patrols the boundaries of the United Planets. But when a handful of Legionnaires get stranded on the farthest side of the universe, they must resort to things most heroes wouldn't do. One goes insane, while another makes the ultimate sacrifice! Eh, we'd even recommend tossing in all the Abnett/Lanning/Coipel *Legion* issues—they're just that good!

"The Wolves of St. August," an ancient legend claiming St. Patrick cursed a group of pagans so they'd turn into wolves every seven years. In "The Corpse," Mignola adapts an Irish yarn where Hellboy tries to bury a body but spirits lingering around all the burial sites won't let him! "Mike Mignola took the very best of Jack Kirby, Frank Frazetta and Alex Toth and made into his unique style," says *Liberty Meadows* creator Frank Cho. "Mignola's masterful sense of design and powerful drawing make Hellboy a visual masterpiece." *Other Hellboy books: Seed of Destruction, Wake the Devil, The Right Hand of Doom and Conqueror Worm*

## 47. THOR VISIONAIRES: WALT SIMONSON
(Marvel softcover)

Writer/artist Simonson shattered the status quo of Thor by answering taboo questions and adding more Norse mythology to the book than had ever been done before. Readers learn what happens when someone else who was worthy picked up Thor's hammer when Balder the Brave gets bitch-slapped and when a menace far greater than any Thor's faced unleashes his fury upon Asgard. "This stuff is just WOW," says Jeph Loeb. "Walt breathed life into a dying franchise. The women looked sexy again, and Beta Ray Bill was added to the lore. A must-have book—the artwork itself is worth the price of admission."

## 46. HELLBLAZER: HARD TIME
(DC/Vertigo softcover)

Prison may be rough—but John Constantine's even rougher. Throwing *Hellblazer*'s shifty rogue into a hardcore American prison, writer Brian Azzarello and artist Richard Corben amazed fans by showing just why Constantine's the one cellmate you don't want. "Richard Corben's artwork was brilliant," says Constantine creator Alan Moore. "And I thought that Brian Azzarello did as good as job of capturing John Constantine as I've seen anybody do. The book was very dark and interesting, with a very sparing approach to magic, which I thought made it all the more convincing and powerful."

## 45. X-MEN I: FOR EXTINCTION
(Marvel softcover)

If the X-Men never had it easy, writer Grant Morrison and artist Frank Quitely made things even worse. In their first X-epic, the tandem introduced the sadistic Cassandra Nova, who's set on not just destroying the X-Men but the entire mutant race—and rattles up quite the death toll in this TPB. Also, fans get a thrilling glimpse of Morrison's original pitch for the X-Men. "Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely launched their run with not only a slick, cool and accessible story," says *Flash* writer Geoff Johns, "but one that you can't shake out of your head."

## 44. USAGI YOJIMBO BOOK 6
(Fantagraphics Books softcover)

Funny animals? Screw that. Stan Sakai's tales of samurai swordplay struggles and sacrifice elevate *Usagi Yojimbo* to the premier class of comic stories. In vol. 6, Usagi is tracked by the demon Jei (last seen in Book 3), whose silvery spear steals your soul on contact. Usagi also reunites with his first love, who he learns married his childhood rival after Usagi left years before to train as a samurai. The kicker of the book happens when Usagi learns he has a son—and can never tell him the truth!

*Also: Fantagraphics Books 1-7, and Dark Horse reprints Shades of Death (Book 8), Daisho (Book 9), The Brink of Life and Death (Book 10), Seasons (Book 11), Grasscutter (Book 12), Grey Shadows (Book 13), Demon Mask (Book 14) and Grasscutter II (Book 15).*

## 43. FANTASTIC FOUR VISIONAIRES: JOHN BYRNE
See above

## 42. [illegible]
(DC softcover)

While every collection of Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso's *100 Bullets* pulls readers deeper into the conspiracy that infects the title, "Hang Up on the Down Low" best represents what drives fans wild about the series. Woven around the relationship of betrayal, murder and paternity, "Bang Up" keeps the pages turning and the gunshots firing. The story revolves around a wannabe gangsta reuniting with his deadbeat dad, who's an enforcer for a Philadelphia mobster. As WildStorm founder Jim Lee puts it in his intro, it's "a combustive story about second chances in the City of Brotherly Love." *Also: Vol. 1: First Shot, Last Call, Vol. 2: Split Second Chance and Vol. 4: A Foregone Tomorrow.*

## 41. AKIRA VOL. 1 (Dark Horse softcover)

This Japanese export epic stands toe to toe with any American saga. Dark Horse's recent collection of Katsuhiro Otomo's groundbreaking cyber-punk masterpiece boasts six weighty volumes starring biker punk Kaneda, whose destiny pits him against his best friend and rival Tetsuo. When Tetsuo's dormant psychokinetic abilities are unleashed after a freak accident, his "awakening" stirs the slumbering child Akira—an omnipotent force that threatens to destroy not only Neo-Tokyo but also all of creation. After that? Get ready for a ride. *Transformers* artist Pat Lee says, "*Akira* is not only a stunning story, but the genius behind Otomo's conceptual designs and innovative panelling are almost unexplainable." *Also: Akira Books 2-6*

## 40. KINGDOM COME

See below

## 39. BANNER (Marvel softcover)

How do you kill the Hulk? That's all Bruce Banner wants to know. After years of living with the monster inside him, Bruce Banner teeters on the edge of insanity and attempts suicide–but the monster won't let him die! Written by Brian Azzarello with art by Richard Corben, *Banner* shaped what was to come for the green goliath. "*Banner* redefined what the Hulk was and defined what the character would be down the road at Marvel," says Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada. "The book stands as one of the best Hulk stories ever told."

## 38. NEIL GAIMAN'S MIDNIGHT DAYS

If you've only read Neil Gaiman's Sandman trade paperbacks, you need this to complete your collection. Filled with stories that didn't fit into other trades, *Midnight Days* collects some of Gaiman's best and most offbeat work for DC. With art by a

the only meeting between the Golden Age Sandman and Gaiman's Sandman as well as the writer's only John Constantine story in *Hellblazer*. And there's even an appearance by Batman!

## 37. PLANETARY VOL. 2: THE FOURTH MAN

(DC/WildStorm softcover)

If you think the Fantastic Four make great heroes, try seeing them as ruthless bad

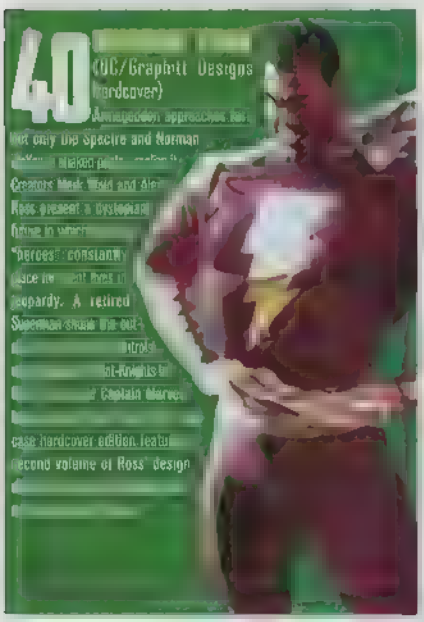
Planetary, the twists keep on comin'. In this volume, the Planetary team uncovers the Four's role in killing a Superman-like being as a baby, assassinating a Wonder Woman-

Vampire Slayer" creator Joss Whedon in his introduction. "Every issue its own short, dazzling tale that would bind the reader even if they had no idea it was part of a larger whole." *Also check out Vol. 1 All Over the World and Other Stories.*

## 36. SIN CITY: A DAME TO KILL FOR

(Dark Horse softcover)

Dames like Ava are impossible to resist, as Dwight McCarthy quickly discov-




# TRADING POST

We interrupt our regularly scheduled sidebar to present you with a special edition of "Trading Post," spotlighting the top trades hitting in JULY. Go nuts! There's something here for everybody.

of *ASM* (vol. 2) #36-#39, read the moving Sept. 11 story as well as Aunt May's discovery of Peter Parker's Spider-Man identity! **$8.99** (July 10)

second half of Grant Morrison's acclaimed run on this series, this collection finds Animal Man falling deeper into the world of radical environmentalism, but a looming "Crisis" nags him in the back of his mind. **Mature Readers. $19.95** (Jul

**(WildStorm/DC)** This trade collects issues #17-#20–where the actual Earth rebels against all humanity–as well as stories from the *Authority Annual 2001* and the *WildStorm Summer Special*. **$14.95** (July 3)

**DAREDEVIL: WAKE UP (right)** **(Marvel)** The collection of the David Mack-Brian Michael Bendis sees Ben Urich investigating the connection between Daredevil and the troubled young son of the murdered villain named Leap Frog. **$9.99** (July 24)

**EX-LES VOL. 2: A WORLD APART** **(Marvel)** Our dimension-hopping mutants battle alternate-reality versions of the Hulk and Galactus in this collection of issues #5-#11. **$14.99** (July 10)

**INCREDIBLE HULK VOL. 1: RETURN OF THE MONSTER (Marvel)** Reprinting *Hulk* #34-#39, the first storyarc by new writer Bruce Jones and John Romita Jr., the trade sees the Green Goliath on the run for the murder of a small boy. But is the Hulk guilty, or is it a massive conspiracy? **$12.95** (Jul

Nova and her mind-controlled army of Shi'ar Imperial Guardsmen! **$19.99** (July 10)

**OUT THERE (CMXmonger/DC)** Four disparate teens must defend their town from the demonic forces trying to take over the world. But what can they do when their parents are working for the demons? Collects *Out There* #1-#6. **$12.95** (July 3)

detective in Partington, Simon Archard and his beautiful, mysterious assistant Emma Bishop on their first adventure against the shadowy Miranda Cross. Collecting *Ruse* issues #1-#6. **$15.95** (July 3) And for more on *Ruse*, check out "Book of the Month" on page 108.

of Odin's death and Thor's ascension to the throne of Asgard, in this collection of *Thor* (vol. 2) #39-#44. **$12.99** (July 17)

Raider Lara Croft battles an army of the undead, abominable snowmen and ancient conquistadors in this collection of her far senes. **$12.95** (July 24)

ultra-violent vigilante named Citizen Pain stalks the streets of Rankor Island, his brother–a serial killer named the Family Man–leaves a trail of corpses in his wake! **$24.95** (July 3)

ers. Haunted by his hard-drinking past, Dwight earns a living as a skuzzy P.I. that is, until Ava steps back into his life. Why has she returned and what does she want? As is typical in the Sin City mythos, nothing is what it seems. It isn't long before Dwight and *Sin City* stalwart Marv team up to blast some serious heads. A film noir classic from creator Frank Miller. "There's no wasted line of art or story," says *Thor* writer Scott Hanna. "Miller has updated the noir style to a level that has not been matched, period." *Other Sin City TPBs: Sin City, Family Values, The Big Fat Kill, That Yellow Bastard (see No. 27), Hell and Back, and Booze, Broads and Bullets.*

## 35. PEDRO AND ME

No one knew who Judd Winick was. *Fantastic Four* scribe Mark Waid had seen Winick a few times on MTV's "Real World: San Francisco" in 1993 but after reading Winick's touching, reverent and sometimes funny autobiographical story of losing his friend and co-star Pedro Zamora to AIDS, Waid couldn't forget him. "When Judd gave me a copy, I didn't really know him or his work very well, and I distinctly remember thinking I'd flip through it just long enough to say I'd looked at it," explains Waid. "I literally could not put it down and that it brought me to tears with its honest passion and depth of emotion."

## 34. 300 (Dark Horse hardcover)

Creator Frank Miller carried readers back in time to visit the Greek battlefields of Thermopylae where 300 brave Spartan soldiers died holding off the entire Persian army in 400 B.C. The entire wrenching story of the battle is told in two-page spreads, making this oversized hardcover—there will never be a softcover printed—the perfect format

## 33. LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN (DC/ABC hardcover)

Don't wait for the movie. If you do, you'll miss all the little nuances writer Alan Moore and artist Kevin O'Neill have packed into this entertaining tribute to the literary characters

Nemo and Mina Murray (from *Dracula*) against two of literature's classic villains. "This is what Moore does best," comments Jeph Loeb (*Spider-Man: Blue*). "He takes iconic characters so they have weight and places them in an entirely unique storyline." Don't miss all the cool extras, which includes a novella prequel, cover gallery and interactive games

## 32. BONE VOL. 2: THE GREAT COW RACE

See right.

## 31. TORSO (Image softcover)

In 1935, a serial killer leaves headless and limbless bodies all across Cleveland's slums. Hunted by real-life G-man Eliot Ness, the "Torso murderer" was never caught. Or was he? With *Torso*, co-creators Brian Michael Bendis and Marc Andreyko recreate a gripping, creepy as-hell true-crime story about America's first serial murderer. Fantastic extras include crime scene photos, newspaper articles and various historical documents that make a haunting story absolutely terrifying.

## 30. ASTRO CITY VOL. 3: CONFESSIONS (Image softcover)

All Brian Kinney wanted was to be a superhero sidekick. But when the mysterious Confessor comes calling, Kinney takes on the identity of Altar Boy under a veil of secrecy, distrust and murder. Confessor has a dark secret... but will Kinney ruin his pg to discover it? Creators Kurt Busiek and Brent Anderson dish out not one, but two great superhero yarns, as there's also a short tale about a man who's

is and why she's haunting him add up to one of the saddest conclusions ever. Extras include a detailed Anderson/Ross sketchbook. In his moving introduction, Neil Gaiman says, "*Astro City* is art, and it is good art." *Check out these other Astro City TPBs: Vol. 1: Life in the Big City, Vol. 2: Family Album, and Vol. 4: Tarnished Angel.*

## 29. DAREDEVIL: YELLOW (Marvel hardcover)

This heartfelt "Year One" take by the team of Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale flashes back to the earliest adventures of Marvel's Man Without Fear and the love triangle between DD alter ego Matt Murdock, law partner Foggy Nelson and secretary Karen Page. "The story was everything that was great about Daredevil," says current *Daredevil* writer Brian Michael Bendis. "It showed people how great the book was, even way back when." The hardcover collection even has a 10-page bonus section showing the technique behind Sale's amazing ink wash art

## 28. SPIDER-MAN: NOTHING CAN STOP THE JUGGERNAUT (Marvel softcover)

Spider-Man's willing to die, if that's what it takes. With just two issues of *Amazing*

## 23 ALL SEASONS (DC hardcover)

before there was TV's "Smallville," there was *Superman For All Seasons*, the earlier adventures of Clark Kent may be in vogue right now, but in 1998, creators Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale crafted this moving tale of Clark's burgeoning superhero career. In this story, we see how being Superman affects Clark's life [illegible] how Clark's life in Smallville influences the man of Steel. It sets the stage for his lifelong feud with Lex Luthor, adds poignant depth to the relationship with Lana Lang, and illustrates how an adopted son of Earth can become its champion thanks to the parenting of two Kansas farmers.

*Spider-Man* (#229, #230) Roger Stern and John Romita Jr. weave the ultimate tale of Spidey's refusal to back down from the most overwhelming of obstacles– [illegible] and pummeling him relentlessly, Juggernaut discovers that Spider-Man may be more unstoppable than he is. "Holy CRAP, could Stern write Spider-Man," enthuses *Kingdom Come* writer Mark Waid. "I still remember exactly where I was, even the couch I was sitting on when I read Part One of that story. It made me love the Juggernaut forever."

## 27 SIN CITY: THAT YELLOW BASTARD (Dark Horse softcover)

All John Hartigan wants to do is save a little girl, even though it costs him everything. Set up, betrayed and then left to rot in jail, Hartigan does his time like a man, until eight years later the little girl he saved is now a woman and she needs saving again. At 19, little Nancy Callahan's all grown up with a body to kill for and a price on her head. As Hartigan gets pulled deeper and deeper into one of the finest crime noir comics ever produced by writer/artist Frank Miller, the ending still shocks the reader no matter how many times they read it.

## 26 SOLAR, MAN OF THE ATOM: ALPHA AND OMEGA (Valiant softcover)

When a normal man becomes a god, no good can come of it. Enter Phillip Seleski, a physicist blessed with godlike powers after surviving a nuclear meltdown. In this story by Jim Shooter, Barry Windsor-Smith and Bob Layton, Seleski desires to change the world for the better, but his powers aren't easy to control. The side effects of such moves affect the entire solar system. As co-plotter/inker Bob Layton observes in the introduction, it's about "a man so obsessed with unlocking the secrets of science that he loses his soul in the process... or so it would seem."

## 25 FANTASTIC FOUR: THE TRIAL OF GALACTUS (Marvel softcover)

Poor Reed Richards. Not only is the super-genius leader of the FF supposed to know all the answers, he's a nice guy, to boot. So when a weary Galactus must consume the Earth in order to survive, both the combined might of the Avengers and FF is needed to pull out all the stops and halt his attack. At the climax of the battle, Reed must make a decision that will make his life, and the lives of the rest of the FF, absolutely miserable.

## 24 DEATH: THE HIGH COST OF LIVING

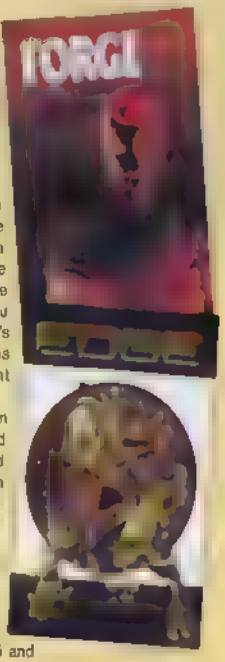
Creators Neil Gaiman and Chris Bachalo follow Death—not the Grim Reaper you'd anticipate, but a happy-go-lucky goth chick who traffics you to your final destination. And one day every century she gets to walk among the living. Death convinces depressed teen Sexton Furnival not to commit suicide. "It was like a great movie that you read," says *Strangers in Paradise* creator Terry Moore. "It was the first comic ever read that had mood. When Death herself comments on her philosophy of life at the end, that really got me. That book was written with considerable passion."

## FORGING AHEAD

### CrossGen begins TPB revolution

Trade paperbacks aren't what they used to be.

With more and more comic fans opting to pick up the collected editions of storylines rather than buy individual issues, CrossGen Comics capitalizes on the idea with its new compendia editions *Forge* and *Edge*, each of which collects at least four storylines from different CrossGen titles.




"Obviously we want everyone to buy everything we publish but CrossGen's titles were set up so you don't have to read every title," says CrossGen Vice President Product Development Tony Panaccio. "With *Forge* and *Edge*, if you like two or three CrossGen titles, you can buy the compendia editions they're in and get a few titles you haven't checked out yet. It's a good way to get fans to try stuff they might not otherwise."



For years, European and Japanese-based publishers have collected multiple stories from different creators in single volumes, but with *Forge* and *Edge*, CrossGen hopes this will be a system more comic companies come to adopt.

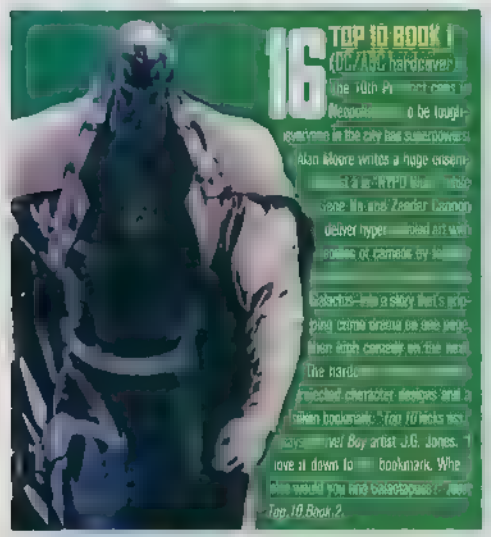
Priced between $9.95 and $11.95 for over 250 pages, both publications are a value-packed way to view CrossGen's ever-increasing and exciting universe. ■ MIKE COTTON

## 23 SUPERMAN FOR ALL SEASONS

See above left.

## 22 SQUADRON SUPREME

With the world in shambles, only the JLA-like Squadron Supreme can put it back together. Writer Mark Gruenwald's story puts superheroes in control of the globe, as the Squadron ends poverty, war, disease and crime. In doing so, they violate everyone's civil rights for the greater good by disarming every citizen and brainwashing criminals into law-abiders! None of which sits well with Nighthawk, a Batman-esque ex-member who forms his own super-army to stop the Squadron before democracy is extinguished! An interesting "extra" in the first printing of this TPB is the late Gruenwald's ashes placed in its printing ink. "*Squadron Supreme* remains one of my favorite stories in comics," says Alex Ross in his accompanying text piece. "[It] still makes me jealous to this day."




in a new sense of grittiness and realism. See such shockers as DD bustin a cap in the Punisher and former lover Elektra's death at the hands of the assassin Bullseye. "The characterization and action were a bit more than the stuff that I was reading at the time," explains *Wolverine: Blood Debt* writer/artist Steve Skroce. "It was more mature and full of powerful images and sequences. It felt more like a film."

## 17. MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER: STEEL NATION (Valiant softcover)

If a robot has artificial intelligence, is it alive? That's what writer Jim Shooter asks in his 1991 revamp of '60s sci-fi hero Magnus, whose duty it is to destroy all intelligent robots in a futuristic society. But when these A.I. 'bots number in the millions to fight for freedom, Magnus starts to wonder if he's doing the right thing by halting this robot revolution. "Jim Shooter's run was just amazing!" remembers writer Roger Stern, who eventually went on to write three issues of the series himself. "There was just so much he could do with that (future society), and Shooter took advantage of it."

## 16. TOP 10 BOOK 1

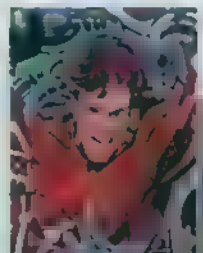
See left

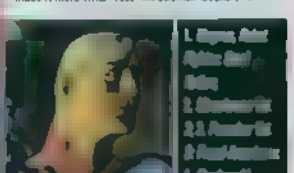
## 15. THE NEW TEEN TITANS: THE JUDAS CONTRACT (DC softcover)

The Titans have a traitor in their midst. This spy knows their secrets and hands them over to Deathstroke the Terminator, who methodically takes out the team. Only Nightwing escapes ...but even he needs help in order to rescue them before it's too late. In this storyarc, Marv Wolfman and George Pérez pull off a set in six issues: Dick Grayson becomes Nightwing for the first time, Kid Flash quits, Jericho (the son of Deathstroke) joins up, ...and a tragic blow hits the team. "*Judas Contract* is a perfect template for powerful, dramatic storytelling," lauds Steve Kuth, penciler for *G.I. Joe*. "This story was pure magic."

## 14. MIRACLEMAN VOL. 3: OLYMPUS (Eclipse softcover)

Alex Ross. Before he crafted *Watchmen*, Moore revamped the classic British hero in people have ever touched the things he tried to open up about the mythology of superheroes," recounts Ross. "In some ways he made it more real—he took the fantastic and made it more vivid." *Also: Miracleman Books 1-4.*





## 21. THE BOOKS OF MAGIC

He's a 12-year-old boy who could grow up to be more powerful than Superman. Meet Tim Hunter, who—long before Harry Potter was a twinkle in J.K. Rowling's eye—was destined to become the world's greatest sorcerer. Follow Tim through the dark and disturbing underbelly of DC's Vertigo universe with John Constantine, the Phantom Stranger, Dr. Occult and Mr. E as your guides. See the deadly serious sides of Dr. Fate, the Spectre and Zatanna and find out if you can figure out which DC "superhero" thinks the world would be a safer place with Tim Hunter dead.

## 20. PREACHER VOL. 3: PROUD AMERICANS (DC/Vertigo softcover)

to take over the world and put a retarded, inbred descendant of Jesus Christ into power. It's up to the Rev. Jesse Custer to stop them using his mighty mind-control power called The Word. It's too bad The Word only works if the bad guys speak English... which has back... for now. This collection by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon shows the lengths to which Custer will go for his friends to do what's right. *Other Preacher books. Vol. 1: Gone to Texas, Vol. 2: Until the End of the World, Vol. 4: Ancient History, Vol. 5: Dixie Fried, Vol. 6: War in the Sun, Vol. 7: Salvation, Vol. 8: All Hell's A'Comin', Vol. 9: Ancient*

## 19. HAWKWORLD (DC softcover)

Hawkman becomes a bird of a different feather in *Hawkworld*. This radical revamp by writer/artist Tim Truman starring a new, grittier Winged Warrior really soars. Katar Hol is a Wingman, the security force of the planet Thanagar, a corrupt imperial society built on the conquest of other races. To cope, Hol becomes a drug addict and gets embroiled in a plot to cleanse his planet of undesirable refugees, and is set up by his superiors. Hol vows to restore his planet—and his own honor—to greatness by battling the forces keeping it in thrall. The events of *Hawkworld* may be a memory to the current Hawkman, but this stands as one of the best relaunch stories ever.

## 18. DAREDEVIL VISIONARIES: FRANK MILLER VOL. 2

Wanna read a good Daredevil book before the movie comes out in 2003? Let your radar sense guide you to this second of three volumes showcasing Frank Miller's original *DD* tenure. Miller took over the writing *and* art in these tales, ushering

## 12. [illegible] (DC Comics)

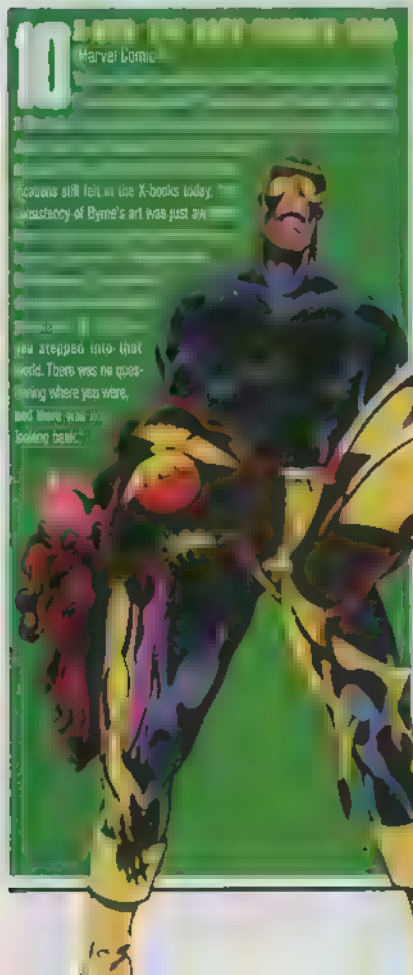
Everything scientist Alec Holland knew is wrong. Holland thought he was a man transformed by industrial sabotage into a horrible swamp creature. But when he discovers he's an actual vegetable, he loses his mind and his humanity before regaining both in one of the most gripping horror/love stories (Really!) you'll ever read. *Swamp Thing* put writer Alan Moore on the map, attracted an adult audience and helped launch DC's Vertigo imprint. *Also: Vol. 2: Love and Death, Vol. 3: The Curse, Vol. 4: A Murder of Crows, Vol. 5: Earth to Earth*

## 12. X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST [illegible]

The X-Men are all but dead. At least that's true in a possible future, where the cold, robot Sentinels rule the globe and mutants they haven't incinerated are imprisoned in camps. The few X-Men left refuse to give up, as a forty-something Kitty Pryde psychically travels through time in a last-ditch effort to stop the event that led to this hellish future. Creators Chris Claremont and John Byrne shocked readers with this dark tale, altering the X-Men's history regardless. "The entire storyline was unexpected," remembers writer Jeph Loeb. "It broke so many traditional storytelling practices in comics by revealing a world that could be–while still reinforcing what the X-Men were all about."

## 11. THE GOLDEN AGE (DC Comics)

Superheroes are irrelevant. And they like it that way. This dark premise kickstarts James Robinson and Paul Smith's *The Golden Age*. Set in a post-WWII DCU, a booming America has all but forgotten about its super-powered defenders. However the evil Ultra-Humanite resurfaces (along with Dynaman, a near-invincible, coke-snorting powerhouse), planning to control the White House. Green Lantern, Johnny Quick and the other "mystery men" re-emerge to take out a surprise villain in one of comics' greatest free-for-alls. "It made me realize how damn cool the original superheroes could be," says *JSA* scribe Geoff Johns. "It's historical context and symbolism, woven into the coolest take on these heroes."


10
Marvel Comics
features still felt in the X-books today.
consistency of Byrne's art was just an
you stepped into that
world. There was no goes-
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looking back."

## THE GRAND-DADDY OF THEM ALL

**Will Eisner, inventor of the "graphic novel"**

Comic trade paperbacks are everywhere these days. But the notion of a comic in a "real" bookstore was once absurd–until one man changed all that.

Will Eisner is generally considered the "inventor" of the graphic novel. His 1978 *A Contract With God*, in which a man unilaterally writes a contract with God and then expects God to honor it, broke new ground.

"I had in mind to take the comic out of the comic book format, and produce a comic that adults would read," Eisner says. Eisner crafted *A Contract With God* in a 8-by-9-inch format that looked like a large-size paperback novel. "The subject matter was more adult' than superheroes, so I wanted a package that would reflect that," he says.

Eisner's tome made it to bookstore shelves, where it remains today. *A Contract with God* (now published by DC Comics) has been in print for 24 years, and seven languages. Eisner went on to craft other "everyman" tales with an adult sensibility, such as *To the Heart of the Storm*, one man's recollection of his family history, and *Dropsie Avenue*, which chronicles 400 years of changes in one street in The Bronx. Eisner remains as vital as ever.

"He can write these things that are in everyone's experience," says *Ultimate Spider-Man* writer Brian Michael Bendis. "When he's writing personal stories, watch out–he's writing about you."

He also laid the groundwork for, well, everything since 1978. "Will Eisner paved the way for all of us in comics to do more serious material," says *Origin* writer Paul Jenkins. "Thank God he came along."

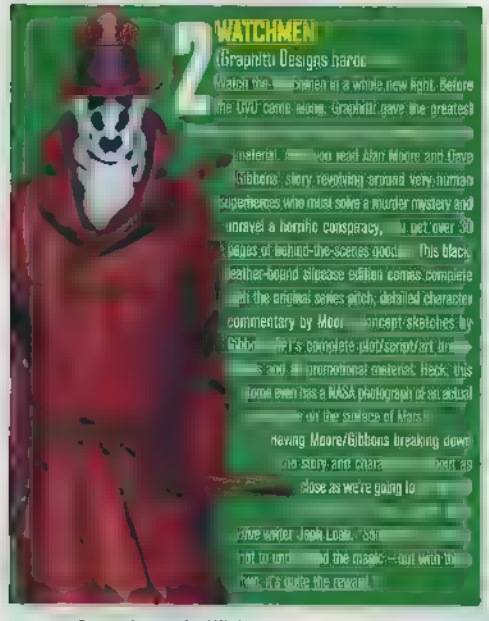
■ JIM McLAUCHLIN

## 10. X-MEN: THE DARK PHOENIX SAGA (Marvel Comics)

See left.

## 9. SUPERMAN: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE MAN OF TOMORROW? (DC softcover)

It was time for the Man of Tomorrow to become the Man of Yesterday. As DC pre-



## 2. WATCHMEN (Graphitti Designs hardcover)

Watch the movie in a whole new light. Before the DVD came along, Graphitti gave the greatest graphic novel ever created a lavish treatment. If you've never read Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' story revolving around very human superheroes who must solve a murder mystery and unravel a horrific conspiracy, you'll get over 30 pages of behind-the-scenes goodies. This black leather-bound slipcase edition comes complete with the original series pitch, detailed character commentary by Moore, concept sketches by Gibbons, it's complete plot/script/art breakdowns and other promotional material. Heck, this tome even has a NASA photograph of an actual [illegible] on the surface of Mars.

Having Moore/Gibbons breaking down the story and characters just as close as we're going to [illegible]

[illegible] writer Jeph Loeb, "can't not to understand the magic that went into this book. It's quite the reward."

## 7. DAREDEVIL: BORN AGAIN (Marvel softcover)

The ultimate DD story! The Kingpin of Crime finally learns exactly who the man behind the mask of Daredevil is, making Matt Murdock's life a literal living hell [illegible] tion the world around him, but his own faith. To put it simply, *Born Again* paved the way for the types of stories that fans are used to seeing from the likes of Vertigo, Marvel Knights and MAX. "Once I found the *Born Again* trade paperback, kept it at my *drawing* table," says *The Order* artist Matt Haley. "It's the single best superhero treatment I've ever read, just because it was such a personal story of betrayal and redemption."

## 6. BATMAN: YEAR ONE (DC softcover)

Everyone knew the story–but it took Frank Miller and Dave Mazzucchelli to make people care about it. Creating a detailed and fast-paced story set during Bruce Wayne's first year as the Dark Knight, the two creators crafted the definitive Batman origin story–and they did it without supervillains. Miller set out to change Batman not into a superhero crime fighter but a terrorist who made life hell for the mob, pimps, pushers and dirty cops. The suspense of the story comes from co-star and then-Captain James Gordon, penalizing his first hellish year in Gotham City as well. Both Batman and Gordon find out the hard way how deep the corruption in Gotham goes.

## 5. ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN VOL. 1 (Marvel hardcover)

The ultimate in reprint collections. This hefty hardcover ain't just a reprint of the first 19 issues of the smash-hit series updating Spidey for the 21st century. It contains the original plot by Marvel prez Bill Jemas, e-mailed correspondence between writer [illegible] by artist Mark Bagley, commentary by Bendis and Jemas, AND a complete reprint of the [illegible] bound collection edition starts off with a bang," says Jeph Loeb. "And any time we get to see how Jemas' mind works it can only be described as Amazing Fantasy."

## 4. SANDMAN VOL. 4: SEASON OF MISTS (DC/Vertigo softcovers)

Ladies and gentlemen... the devil has left the building. Or Hell, actually. And Lucifer wants the Sandman, a.k.a. Morpheus the master of the dreamworld, to run it. Only one problem: Morpheus doesn't want the job. Creator Neil Gaiman has crafted one hell of a tale here. ...and the best "extra" in this TPB is that it's one of 10 Sandman collections, painting one of comics' richest canvases. *Also: Vol. 1: Nocturnes and Preludes, Vol. 2: The Doll's House, Vol. 3: The Dream Country, Vol. 5: A Game of You, Vol. 6: Fables and Reflections, Vol. 7: Brief Lives, Vol. 8: World's End, Vol. 9: The Kindly Ones, Vol. 10: The Wake.*

## 3. BATMAN: THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (DC hardcover)

Dedo are, you've already read this ultimate Batman tale–but this slipcase edition makes it even better. Sure, you can enjoy Frank Miller's story starring a grizzled 50-something Dark Knight coming outta retirement to fight crime in a hellish Gotham City. When you're done, this version comes with Miller's original plot/script to issue #4 (guess what–it had a much darker ending), a compilation of the mainstream articles on DKR from sources like *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*, a sketchbook section and color art plates by Miller. (Hey, if you're really ambitious, try to also hunt down *The Complete Frank Miller Batman* hardcover by Longmeadow Press–it collects *DKR*, *Batman: Year One* and a little-known Batman Christmas story penciled by Miller.)

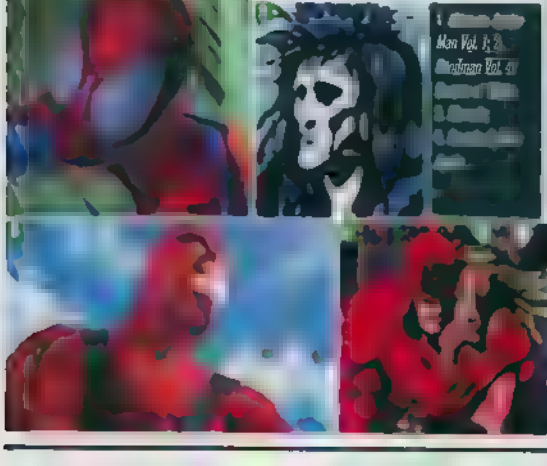
## 2. WATCHMEN (Graphitt Designs hardcover)

See above

paved to start Superman from scratch in 1986, the publisher wanted to send off the "old" [illegible] Lex Luthor and Braniac in the Fortress of Solitude a final time, leaving every reader with a tear in their eye. "A bittersweet goodbye to Superman continuity in order to pave way for a revamped Man of Steel, *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow* worked as both a nostalgic nod to a simpler past, and a look forward to all that comics could be," says *Sojourn* scribe Ron Marz. "This 'last' Superman story is also one of the best."

## 8. MARVELS (Marvel hardcover)

The history of the Marvel Universe never looked so good. Take from a photographer's point of view, Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross' *Marvels* humanized everything that was otherworldly or fantastic in the Marvel Universe, from mutant prejudice to a threat that could destroy the world. "I get all fanboy over that book," says *Marvel Boy* artist J.G. Jones. "It just had so much heart. It was an exploration of the extraordinary seen from a very human perspective." The Marvel hardcover edition not only had a tremendous fold-out cover by Ross, but also tons of sketchbook material, photo reference and creator commentary



# 1 MAUS: A SURVIVOR'S TALE

(Pantheon hardcover)

When you talk about comic books as an art form, the first, last and best example is Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*.

*Maus*, an intensely personal account of surviving a World War II Nazi concentration camp, transcends comics. Ask any artist or cartoonist in this field, and they'll tell you that this Pulitzer-Prize-winning graphic novel represents what all comic books aspire to be.

"I will always remember who gave *Maus* to me," says *Ultimate Spider-Man* writer Brian Michael Bendis. "I didn't even know it existed and my rabbi had it. It showed me undeniable proof that the medium can reach anyone."

*Maus* tells the story of Spiegelman's father, Vladek Spiegelman, and tells his brutal story of Jewish life in Europe during Nazi occupation from the late 1930s until the end of World War II. But Spiegelman the cartoonist takes a unique look at the struggle between the Nazis and the Jews by transforming the players into animals: cats (Nazis), mice (Jews), pigs (Jews working for the Nazis) and frogs (Frenchmen).

Vladek's tale begins in Poland in 1935. He works as a successful textiles merchant and marries into a prominent family. But when the Germans begin rounding up all Jews into ghettos, the Spiegelman family sees itself being torn apart. At one point, a mercy possess to death the Spiegelman's first son, Richieu, rather than surrender him to the Nazis. And unfortunately, the depravity and cruelty the surviving Spiegelmans must endure only becomes worse the longer they live.

But *Maus* isn't only about one survivor's journey through the Holocaust. It's also about Art's deteriorating relationship with Vladek, as the two constantly butt heads over their respective lifestyles. And it doesn't help Art that Vladek's suffering from various maladies; there's a parallel set up between Vladek's death and his Holocaust story coming to an end that gives the entire tale a smoldering sense of doom and inevitability. And yet at the same time, there's a prevailing feeling of hope that comes from having survived such a terrible ordeal.

*Maus* won critical and commercial success for Spiegelman, whose work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Playboy*, *The New Yorker*, *The Village Voice* and many other publications. In 1992, the Pulitzer Prize board created a special category to honor Spiegelman's work on the project, and even today, creators still rave about *Maus*' impact and importance.

"It's still the best work the medium has ever produced," notes *Pedro and Me* creator Judd Winick. "It's personal, it's moving and it is one for the ages. A hundred years from now, people will still be reading *Maus*."

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*This list was compiled and written by Mel Cayto, Mike Cotton, Brian Cunningham, Pat McCallum, James McDonough, Jim McLauchlin, Casey Seijas, Matthew Senreich, Andy Serwin and Jesse Thompson.*

*Wanna buy all 100 TPBs? The majority can be found in your local comic store. Other out-of-print books can be found online or by attending a convention.*

# CASTING call

## WIZARD casts the ORIGIN MOVIE!

**With Wolverine-mania riding higher than ever thanks to the success of the *Origin* mini-series, the white-hot X-titles and the upcoming "X-Men" movie sequel, we thought it was time the Canadian Canuckleheaded got the spotlight on the silver screen. To that end, we're casting a feature film based on the just-completed *Origin* mini-series, which finally revealed Wolverine's background that's been kept secret for over 30 years! Set at the turn of the 20th century, imagine a wilderness costume drama with a cast of some of Hollywood's hottest stars and you've got the perfect third installment in the X-franchise!**

KERR SMITH as **WOLVERINE**

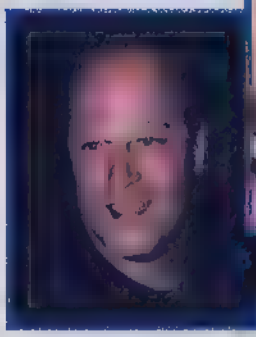
Smith ("Dawson's Creek") possesses the brooding intensity needed to pull off the role of a young Wolverine, a.k.a. Logan, a.k.a. young James Howlett. Plus, Smith has the lean but athletic build necessary to play the still-developing mutant madman.

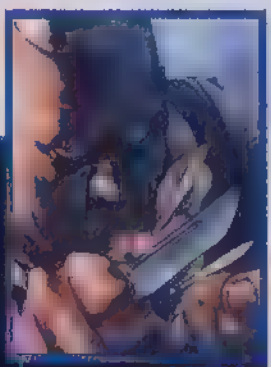
ALICIA WITT as **ROSE**

Alternately young and innocent yet strangely seductive, Rose, Logan's guardian, should be portrayed by an actress you can pull off both ends of the spectrum. We like Witt, who's been a good girl on "Cybill" and a sleazy seductress on "The Sopranos."

## ANTHONY HOPKINS as MASTER HOWLETT

Hopkins will add a nice touch of class and true acting prowess as Logan's estranged grandfather. And we know he's got the chops to play obsessive characters, as he excelled playing Dr. Hannibal Lecter in "Hannibal" and "Silence of the Lambs."



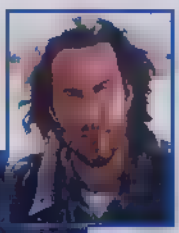


## MICHAEL CHIKLIS as COOKIE MALONE

If you've been watching Chiklis on FX's "The Shield," you know what kind of scummy no-goodnik he can play. He'd be excellent as Cookie, the grave-robbing skel who has several run-ins with Logan.

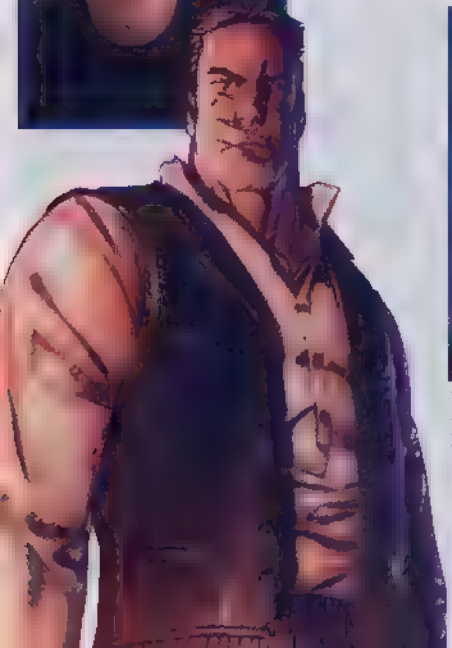
## COLE HAUSER as DOG

You need a total badass to take on Logan, and if you saw "Pitch Black," you saw Hauser go toe-to-toe with Vin Diesel. Hauser's big, tough and he owns a steely stare that's perfect to play Logan's longtime tormentor.



## JOHN CORBETT as SMITTY

Corbett ("Sex in the City," "Northern Exposure") has got the imposing physical presence and the range to pull off the role of Smitty, the sensitive world traveler who takes Logan under his wing but steals Rose away in the process.



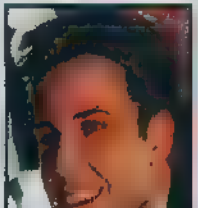
QUIET ON THE SET!

# SEEING RED

## Actor Ben Affleck dons the Daredevil costume

It's a wild summer in downtown Los Angeles: Hot chicks wearing leather, heroes bounding rooftops, and even Stan Lee making an appearance.

Those are just some of the ingredients making up "Daredevil," the 20th Century Fox release set for February 14, 2003 that brings Marvel Comics' famed blind lawyer-by-day and hero-by-night to the screen. As things heat up this summer, "Daredevil" actor Ben Affleck has donned his summer wardrobe—the Daredevil costume.



BEN AFFLECK

"We're very pleased. Ben looks fantastic in the suit," said "Daredevil" Producer Gary Foster of the 6-foot-3 actor. "He looks strong. He's got that superhero build.

"I've been on the Internet reading the talk-back on the costume, and it's been overwhelmingly positive, thank goodness," Foster said. "We were respectful to the image and when people see the film, they'll know why it's a good look."

Screenwriter/director and former *Daredevil* writer Kevin Smith certainly agrees. He saw what he called "a ton of awesome-looking footage" while he was on set. "I saw Affleck as DD putting the hurt on a criminal. The film looks phenomenal. Mark and his director of photography are shooting a beautiful, slick picture.

But filming is just part of the process; Johnson, Foster and the rest of the film's producers must now live up to a now-mighty Marvel film legacy. "There's no question that 'Spider-Man' raised the bar," Foster said. "To me, the success of 'Spider-Man' is nothing but a positive for 'Daredevil.' It continues to build the Marvel brand. I'm very happy that it was successful. Now we'll carry that ball." ■ JIM MCLAUGHLIN



# KINGPIN OF THE HILL

*Wizard* recently caught up with actor Michael Clarke Duncan, who's set to portray the Kingpin in the upcoming "Daredevil" movie. Here's what he had to say about taking on the role of Marvel's baddest crime boss.

**WIZARD: WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE KINGPIN CHARACTER?**

DUNCAN: He's Wilson Fisk, the big fella who runs all the mobs in New York. No one can touch him. He's a big guy, but he's very agile and he knows karate and stuff.

**HOW'D YOU GET READY FOR THE ROLE?**

They actually told me I was too small. I have to get up to 340 pounds, and I'm at 325 right now. I'm doing a lot of heavy lifting. And I have to eat five or six times a day. I stick down everything now, and I'm getting paid for it!

**WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'LL BRING TO THE CHARACTER?**

I'm going to bring something else totally different to this guy because in the comic book, he was white with a bald head. So this is like an honor to me, being an African-American, to be portraying the guy. I've always wanted to be like a Kingpin type, where I get to order everyone around. And for the first time, I don't have any makeup. I'm in nice suits. I have nice shoes, gold watches, platinum jewelry; I smoke cigars and have pretty women around me. So, you know, it's kind of cool.

**DO YOU GET TO KEEP ANY OF THAT STUFF WHEN FILMING WRAPS?**

[*Laughs*] Oh, definitely. Always! ■ JENNY PETERS

MICHAEL CLARKE DUNCAN PLAYS THE KINGPIN OF CRIME

# ons

**NIGHT VISION** In keeping with the dark theme for "Daredevil," the first few weeks of filming took place primarily at night. Los Angeles residents spotted Affleck bounding across rooftops. A street crowd even gathered as leather-clad Jennifer Garner (playing DD's love-interest/assassin Elektra) perched on a ledge. Some passers-by feared she might be a suicide jumper.

**'TAN'S STAN'** Stan Lee, the co-creator of the Daredevil character, appears as a character simply called "Kid Stan." Lee wouldn't confirm the rumor, but did say, "I play various pedestrians on the street whose life is saved by the very young Daredevil. Is that enough of a tease?"

**BOLE MODELS** Affleck didn't have to work too hard for cinematic inspiration for Daredevil. "He's mixing DD into Christopher Reeve called Superman or Michael Keaton called Batman," said Kevin Smith. "I was just blown away by the stuff I saw. Kudos to the boy."

**FAN FIGHT** "Jay and Silent Bob Strikes Back" director Kevin Smith has forged a friendship with "Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson, earning a cameo role in the film as a character named Jack Kirby, an ode to the legendary Marvel artist. Smith plays a forensics worker who provides a clip to reporter Ben Urich.

**COSTUME PARTY** Achieving the right look for Daredevil was crucial. The filmmakers opted for a costume made of sculpted red leather. "We wanted a traditional look with a contemporary flair. Spray skin stretch tights aren't the right move for Daredevil," noted Producer Gary Lucchesi. "We wanted to have form follow function."

**EXTREME MAKEOVER** Director Mark Steven Johnson describes Daredevil's fighting style as "precise, everything you need for fighting crime. It has no unnecessary frills, similar to what a motorcycle racer would wear. You need certain padding, certain protection that you would need to do the things Daredevil does. So no red Spandex."

**DEF Scar** To help Ben Affleck play the blind Matt Murdock, he trained with nightclub actor Tom Sizemore for the fighting scenes. Affleck and Johnson viewed hours of movie footage starring the late Katsu Shintaro, a Japanese actor who starred in a series of films about a blindfolded swordsman named Zatoichi.

**BLOOD RED** The movie's opening scene—based on Joe Quesada's cover to *Daredevil* vol. 2) #3—features a beaten and bloodied Daredevil. "From the moment we meet Daredevil, he's in bad shape, bleeding to death," noted Johnson. "Our story is then told in flashback to reveal how and why he got to this point."

**KING OF THE HILL** Director Johnson opted for Michael Clarke Duncan, the African-American star of "The Green Mile," for the Kingpin, a Caucasian in the comics. "I'm not concerned with matching skin tone," said Johnson. "We have to believe if the Kingpin ever gets a hold of Daredevil, he'll break him in half. Michael has that impressive, physical presence."

**A HOT PAGE OF AGGRAVA** Johnson needed an equal—both in terms of physicality and sex appeal—for the Elektra role. He turned to Garner of ABC's year breakout TV hit, "Alias." "She is just so beautiful and such a great actress," Johnson said. "We really needed a great actress, cause Elektra is a very, very complicated character. She's a Greek tragedy."

**CLOTH-ULT ENERGY** When it came time to design Daredevil's costume, director Mark Steven Johnson tapped Costume Designer James Acheson, the man who created the web-crawler's suit in "Spider-Man"!

# GETTING BACK INTO 'BLACK'

## Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones reprise roles in 'Men in Black 2'

It's something old, something new something Black and something 3.

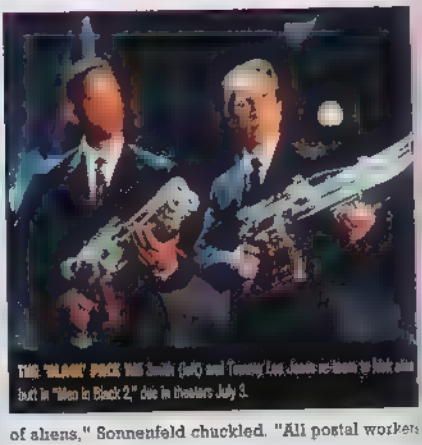
When an obscure Malibu Comic gets to the screen and becomes a sensation that grosses $250 million, the mission is clear: Sequel!

That's what'll happen on July 3 when Columbia Pictures' "Men in Black 2," the follow-up to the surprise-hit 1997 feature, hits screens. Original director Barry Sonnenfeld is back, along with stars Tommy Lee Jones (Agent K) and Will Smith (Agent J)—even though Sonnenfeld once swore the flick could never warrant a sequel.

"I'm amazed to be here," Sonnenfeld said from the set. "I guess the first movie was pretty decent. I'm a little worried we're going to be compared to the first one. No one knew what to expect. This time, we don't have that luxury."

Elements of the past definitely abound. The concept—a secret government agency that monitors the many extraterrestrials living on Earth—remains the same, as do the trappings. MiB's "Central Dispatch" at Kennedy Airport is shot on the exact same stage as it was in the first movie. And veteran Agent K, mind-wiped at the end of the first "MiB," is back.

"He's been working in a Cape Cod post office full of aliens," Sonnenfeld chuckled. "All postal workers everywhere are aliens. Now you know why they're always so crazy."

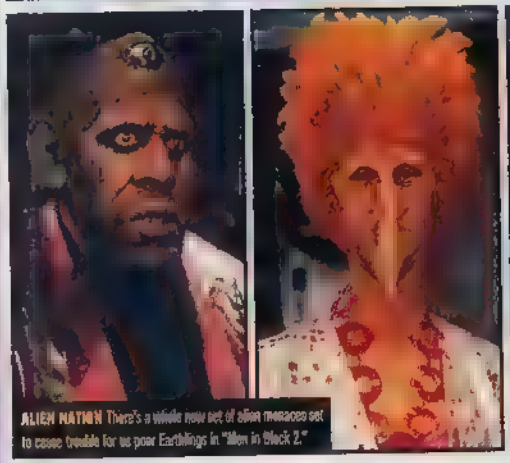


THE "BLACK" PACK Will Smith (left) and Tommy Lee Jones reprise their roles in "Men in Black 2," due in theaters July 3.

But the past has come back to haunt him. "Serleena comes back to Earth looking for this thing that K should have given her 25 years ago, and she's pissed," Sonnenfeld said. "K is the only one who really knows how to stop her, but his memory's been erased."

Serleena is one of the new elements, an alien temptress who controls plant life played by Lara Flynn Boyle ("The Practice"). She's set to punish the Earth, using the entire plant kingdom as a weapon, until she gets what she wants. It's up to J to restore K's memory and send Serleena packing. That's where an "MiB" staple—amazing special effects—tales over.

"Visual effects is the whole foundation where this movie rests," said Visual Effects Supervisor John Andrew Berton Jr. "In the world of feature films, things happen best the way the director wants them to happen. And this is what Barry wants...again." ■ JMd.



ALIEN NATION There's a whole new set of alien menaces set to cause trouble for us poor Earthlings in "Men in Black 2."

# TRAILERS...

**BIRDS OF PREY** The WB network has officially signed on to air the "Birds of Prey" TV show as part of its primetime lineup starting in Fall 2002 on Wednesday nights at 9 p.m. Based on the DC Comic of the same name, "Birds of Prey" stars Dina Meyer ("Beverly Hills, 90210") as Oracle. Ashley Scott ("Dark Angel") as the Huntress and Rachel Skarsten ("Virginia's Run") as Black Canary. The three operatives team up to fight crime in New Gotham a few years after the Joker kills Catwoman and cripples Batgirl (who then becomes Oracle), two acts that send Batman into self-imposed exile. Ian Abercrombie (Mr. Pitt on "Seinfeld") will play butler Alfred, while Sherilyn Fenn ("Twin Peaks") and Shemar Moore ("The Brothers") also star on the show, to be produced by Laeta Kalogridis ("Lara Croft: Tomb Raider"), Mike Tollin, Brian Robbins and Joe Davola.

**TORO GOES TO HELL** Director Guillermo del Toro ("Blade II") recently announced he would forgo directing "Blade III" in favor of helming the live-action "Hellboy" feature film because both films are scheduled to shoot at the same time. Hellboy, created by Mike Mignola for Dark Horse Comics, tells the story of a demon conjured by Nazis that becomes a paranormal investigator for a secret U.S. government agency.

**POW!** Entertainment, the movie-and-TV production company of Marvel co-founder Stan Lee, has inked a deal for three new Lee concepts to be made into films by MGM and Cheyenne Enterprises, the production company operated by Bruce Willis. "It's essentially doing what I did in the early days of Marvel, coming up with new concepts," Lee said. "The difference now is that instead of writing the script myself, I write a detailed outline, and we go and get the best screenwriters." One project is "Femizons," which Lee said "takes place in a world where women are the dominant sex, and men are just their subjects." "Nightbird" follows a woman who leads a double life. "It's a plot you haven't seen before," Lee said. "There are some unique things in her 'normal' identity before you even get to the other life." But the crown jewel of the deal may be "Double Man," set to be directed by Antoine Fuqua, hot off the success of "Training Day." The [illegible] turns a James Bond-esque spy hero.

**Giant spiders** are taking over the world! With all the [illegible] Man perhaps your local cineplex sported one of many gigantic inflatable Spider-Man blow-ups seen around the world at various theaters. The inflatable Spideys were created by Joanne Allor's Barking Dog Promotions for Sony Entertainment. The giant blow-ups were constructed from 388,800 square inches of vinyl-coated nylon and held together by 120,000 individual stitches—approximately 80 miles of thread! Spidey measures 60 feet tall by 34 feet wide and weighs 400 pounds!

**CrossGen's** *Sigil* and *Sauriens*, two sci-fi flavored properties, have been optioned for film, television and video game rights by Threshold Entertainment. Threshold is run by Larry Kasanoff, producer of the "Mortal Kombat" movies and TV series. "I think Larry saw the potential for another 'Star Trek' with 'Sigil,'" said Michael Uslan, the executive producer of Warner Bros.' "Batman" movies, who will also serve as executive producer for these properties. "And if you look at the Sauriens with a wistful eye toward the Klingons, then there's a lot of great [illegible] n't be surprised to see this follow the 'Mortal Kombat' path, with a potential feature motion picture, followed by a live-action TV series, followed by an animated TV series." "Scream" director Wes Craven of Craven/Maddalena Pictures has also sealed a deal to option CrossGen's *Mystic*. The current plan is to roll the tale of two sorceress-sisters out as a live-action TV series in the vein of "Buffy, the Vampire Slayer."

**It's official.** Frank Oz, the voice of Yoda and the director of "The Adventures of Elmo in Grouchland," will be the director of the "Powers" movie. Based on the image comic, *Powers* deals with two police detectives who investigate superpowered crimes. "I [illegible] more like the comic. He wasn't [illegible] thrilled to give him that," said *Powers* creator Brian Michael Bendis.

**According** to published reports, James Marsden, Cyclops in the "X-Men" movies, is in negotiations to portray title character Jesse [illegible] DC/Vertigo. Universal Pictures is showing interest in optioning Mike Kunkel's *Herobear & The Kid* as an animated property. Top Cow's *Inferno*, about a top-secret military excursion to Hell, has been [illegible] films.

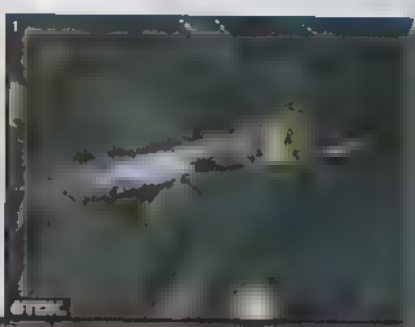
■ *Jedi* AND THE WIZARD STAFF

Birds of Prey: The WB; Spider-Man: Sony Pictures Entertainment

# SUPERHERO SHOWDOWN

## Superhero games steal the show at E3 2002

Forget the clones! It was the attack of the super heroes at this summer's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), the video game industry's biggest North American trade convention. Activision's *Spider-Man* and Ubi Soft's *Batman Vengeance* have shown that—when done right—four-color heroes can be just as popular on your favorite video game console. Game developers have taken note, as evidenced by the glut of superhero-based games introduced at this year's show. Here's a brief rundown.



**1 AQUAMAN** (Publisher: TDK Interactive; Platform: GAMECUBE, Xbox; Expected Release: Quarter 4 2002) DC's king of the sea uses his cybernetic hook, submarines and fishy friends like sharks and killer whales to protect his undersea kingdom of Atlantis from classic baddies like Black Manta and Ocean Master.

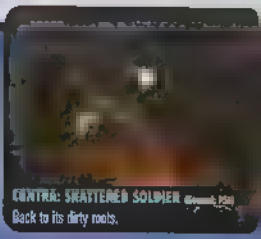
**2 BATMAN DARK TOMORROW** (Platform: GAMECUBE, PS2, Xbox; Q4 2002) Promising the darkest video version of DC's Dark Knight to date, this new title delivers the ultimate Bat experience. The Caped Crusader takes on Black Mask, Killer Croc and Mr. Freeze as he searches for clues surrounding Commissioner Gordon's mysterious abduction.

**3 BLADE II** (Activision: PS2, Xbox; Q4 2002) Featuring an all-new, fully 3-D fighting engine with awesome finishing moves and an original storyline, this suckhead-stompin' sequel captures all the style and attitude seen in the movie version of Marvel's vampire-killing badass.

### SNEW

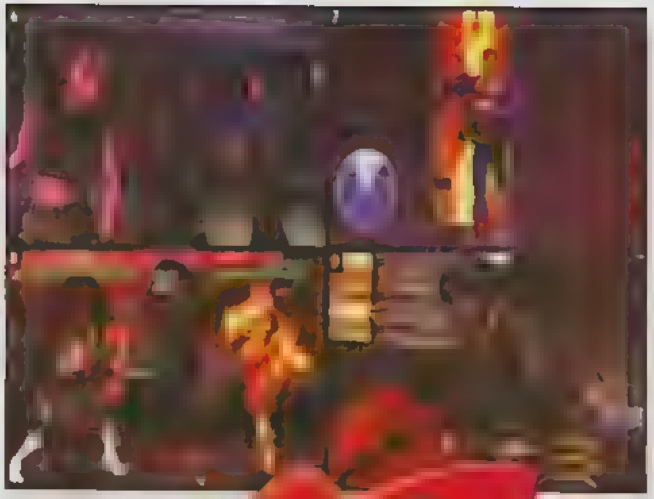
**Q3 2002, A time of chaos in** [illegible] type. At last year's show, *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Final Fantasy X* and *Luigi's Mansion* were all the rage, and each went on to become certifiable hits. So what were the buzz games at this year's Expo? Here's a few we saw that could hit the big time.

**BRUTE FORCE** (Microsoft; Xbox) *Halo* with fiercer people.



**CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER** (Konami; PS2) Back to its dirty roots.

**4 BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER** (Electronic Arts, Xbox; Q3 2002) From film to TV to Dark Horse comic to pixelized heroine. This Xbox-exclusive title lets Buffy fans live out their wildest fantasies (down, boys) as they take control of the super-sexy slayer in this third-person, vampire



**DAREDEVIL** (Xbox, GameCube, PS2, Xbox; Q1 2003) Inspired by such Frank Miller works as *Elektra Lives* and *The Man Without Fear*, this full-roaming, 3-D action title features Marvel's band superhero cleaning up the streets of

**3 JUSTICE LEAGUE INJUSTICE FOR ALL** (Game Boy Advance; Q4 2002) Based on the successful Cartoon Network animated series, *Justice League* lets play-

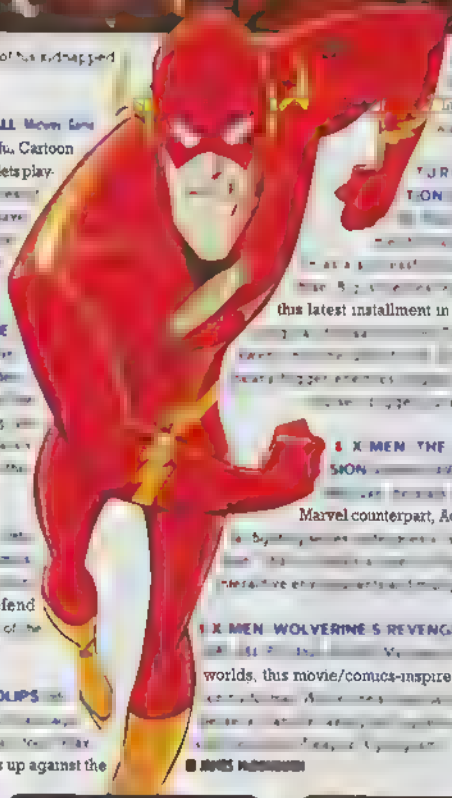
**6 LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS**

**SUPERMAN THE MAN OF STEEL**

this Xbox exclusive lets gamers defend

**7 SUPERMAN SHADOW OF APOKOLIPS**

ers control the Man of Steel as he goes up against the



Junior and alien

**TUROK EVOLUTION**

this latest installment in the series. The

**8 X MEN THE NEXT DIMENSION**

Marvel counterpart, Activision's popu-

**9 X MEN WOLVERINE'S REVENGE**

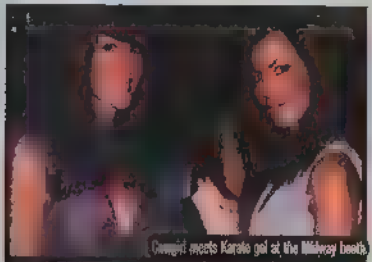
worlds, this movie/comics-inspired X-game writ-

**JAMES MASTROMARCO**

# boothingbeauties

SPOKESMODEL ALERT!

Part of the experience at E3 are the omnipresent models who coax you into visiting their booths. Well, far it be from us to prevent them from doing their job, so every photo opportunity we got, we took! ■ JMcD



Cowgirl meets Karate girl at the Midway booth.

Show me the money on the E3 floor!

Three Tetris girls bid us adieu.

X-Ladies of Activision.

# LICENSE TO KILL

## Licensed properties that'll knock 'em dead

Ever wish you were the most powerful man in the universe, the baddest bounty hunter in the galaxy or even able to pilot one of those Veritech fighter jets? Well, quit your jobs now, cuz what we saw at E3 will let you do just that!

**EVIL DEAD: A FISTFUL OF BOOMSTICK (THQ; PS2, Xbox; Q1 2003)** Thanks to the Book of the Dead, legions of Deadites are running rampant. It's now up to gamers to assume the role of Ash to save the day. Groovy!

**THE LORD OF THE RINGS (EA, PS2; Q4 2002)** This third-person, action-adventure lets players relive all the medieval madness of the trilogy's first two films. Playable characters include the noble Aragorn and the elfin archer Legolas!

**MASTERS OF UNIVERSE HE-MAN: THE POWER OF GREYSKULL (TDK; GBA; Q4 2002)** Follow the most powerful man in the universe as he saves Eternia from Skeletor and his cronies. Expect *Diablo*-style, sword-swinging action, vehicular combat, and a four-player mode.

**ROBOTECH: BATTLECRY (TDK; GAMECUBE, PS2, Xbox; Q4 2002)** This faithful reproduction of the groundbreaking animated series lets fans strap themselves into a transformable Veritech fighter to battle Zentraedi invaders.

**SIMPSONS SKATEBOARDING (EA/Fox; PS2; Q3 2002)** Cowabunga. America's favorite dysfunctional family kicks it Tony Hawk style!

**STAR WARS: BOUNTY HUNTER (Lucasarts; PS2; Q4 2002)** Taking control of "Episode II's" enigmatic bounty hunter, Jango Fett, gamers journey to the seediest locales of the Star Wars universe while on a job to bring in the leader of a mysterious cult—dead or alive. ■ JMcD

**RESIDENT EVIL ZERO** (GameCube)
Prequel promises geeler graphics.

**SHADOW** (Game Boy)
The unstoppable superninja is back!

**WAR OF THE MONSTERS** (PS2, PS1)
It's *Rampage* for the new millennium.

# manga MANIA!

COOL JAPANESE COMIC AND ANIMATION NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

## TOKYO STORY

### Drool over cool toy lines previewed at Tokyo Toy Show 2002

DAMN, BUT JS JAPANESE TOYS ARE WEIRD.

"Ohayo goza.masu!" That's how you say hello in Japan, but we said goodbye to our sister magazine, *ToyFare*, and sent 'em overseas to get the scoop on the wonder toys of Japan.

**GUNDAM**

As long as Japan exists, there will be new Gundam toys. Here are a few of the action figures and vehicles. **(Bandai)**

**KINNIKUMAN**

The new show is out in Japan and coming stateside this fall, but Japan will have these swanky super-poseable figures soon. Both the original and Second Generation wrasslers get the treatment. **(Bandai)**

**MARVEL KUBRICKS**

Toy fans have been going gaga for Medicom's KUBRICKs, and KUBRICKs are going gaga for everything. Up next are everybody's favorite Marvel superheroes! **(Medicom)**

**AH! MY GODDESS**

Fan-favorites, the three goddesses Urd, Skuld and Belldandy appear in heavenly third series form thanks to these Yellow Submarine figures **(Yamato)**

**KINGDOM HEARTS**

The video game from Disney and Squaresoft is a smashing success in Japan and toys had to happen. Here are the main characters Sora, Riku and Kairi **(Tomy)**

**SAILOR MOON**

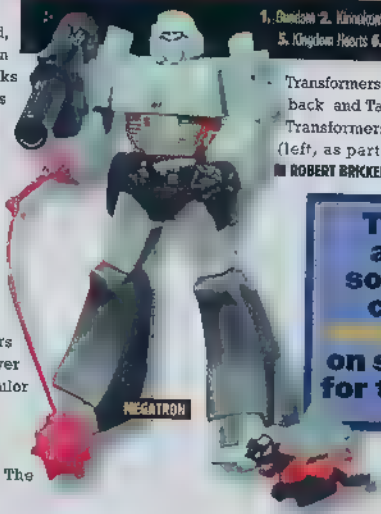
Hotcha! You can't pose 'em, but Sailors Mars, Saturn and Mercury have never looked this good. Part of a whole Sailor statue series **(Kotobukiya)**

**TRANSFORMERS**

Hot in America, hot in Japan. The Transformers are making a global comeback and Takara, maker of the original Transformers, produces this Megatron (left, as part of the assault **(Takara,**

**ROBERT BRICKEN**

1. Gundam 2. Kinnikuman 3. Marvel Kubricks 4. Ah! My Goddess 5. Kingdom Hearts 6. Sailor Moon




**This is just a preview, so be sure to check out**

**on sale July 10, for the full deal!**

# BANZAI GIRL

## Asian model debuts manga-style comic

JAPANESE RUMOR MILL

Straight from the Philippines comes a new manga style comic book about the adventures of an Asian schoolgirl whose wacky nightmares come crashing through to the real world. Loosely based on creator, co-artist and writer Jinky Coronado's real-life experiences, *Banzai Girl* debuts as a mini-series in August from Simus Comics, and each issue includes a photo gallery featuring Coronado dressed as her comic book alter ego. *Wizard* recently spoke with the 22-year-old creator, now based in Ohio.

**WIZARD: You're also a model and beauty contestant. What made you want to create a comic?**

**CORONADO:** Modeling and pageants paid for college. While in school, I attended a "Creating Comics Seminar that [writer and agent] David Campti of Glass House Graphics taught in Manila, [Philippines] and I learned so much in those three days that I was drawn back.

**Who is "Banzai Girl"?**

"Banzai Girl" Jinky Coronado is a gal of three worlds—she just doesn't know it yet. She has recurring nightmares about being a princess who saw her father murdered in her arms; she has others of being a futuristic freedom fighter. Both nightmares unfold giving clues to solve the wild, strange problems in her real life.

**Where do you get your ideas?**

My life! The concept is my life "to the Nth degree"—the characters in the story are everyone I know! It has a manga-influenced style, fun characters, lots of action, pretty pictures, shadowy monsters, wild settings, a cool story—so I guess I'm sorta the star. Also, I don't do this book solo: Michael Kelleher colors it—brilliantly! Matt Thompson letters it. And Wilson "Wunan" Tortosa [*Battle of the Planets*] helps me to finish the art. Their efforts are inspirational.

**Any ambition to turn "Banzai Girl" into a multimedia star?**

Wouldn't that be nice? Besides the official **www.BanzaiGirlJinky.com** Website, there are prints, T-shirts, thongs(!), mouse pads and stickers in the works, and a preview book is now out. My sister, Michelle and I are recording some songs that might become a CD. After that, who knows? ■ **MEL CAYLO**

**MEET JINKY AT WIZARD WORLD CHICAGO JULY 5-7!**

# ANIMEBUZZBOX

**ANIME NATION** In a growing indication that anime is slowly conquering the country, starting in July Starz Encore's ACTION channel will debut "Animeworks," an [illegible] to present a different anime every Friday at midnight. The move is part of the premium channel's [illegible] programming. Beginning in July, the channel will debut the restored version of "Akira," which was well received last year in theaters and on DVD. Check your local listings for showtimes, but remember you have to be a subscriber to Starz Encore's ACTION channel, too!

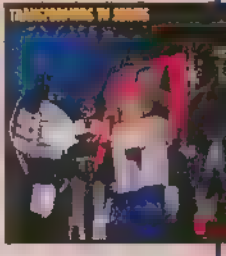
**DEADLY CONTEST ADV** Films is holding a contest to give fans a chance to be a part of their [illegible] series, dubbing it "Lady Death Rises" on the popular Chaos! Comics character. One grand prize winner will have their name inscribed onto one of the key gravestones in the film, plus they'll also get an original animation cel set-up of the scene signed by the producers. To enter, fans must design their very own tombstone and send it in with the official entry form, available for downloading and printing from **www.advfilms.com**. Entries must be postmarked by July 13, 2002.

**OH, YU-GI!** 4Kids ("Pokémon" "Digimon") has partnered with Funimation ("Dragon Ball Z") to distribute home videos of 4Kids' latest hit anime series, "Yu-Gi-Oh!" in the United States. Fans have been clamoring for the videos since late last year when the popular show—about a high school student who plays a trading card game where he battles opponents with virtual Reality Monsters—first debuted. The first releases on both VHS and DVD will appear this fall.

**FUN IN A BOX** Speaking of 4Kids, the entertainment company recently unveiled its Saturday-morning program fall lineup for Fox. Dubbed the "Fox Box," the lineup should please anime enthusiasts because "Ultraman Tiga," "Kirby" and "Kinnikuman: Ultimate Muscle" are all on the schedule, with "Kirby" and "Kinnikuman" both airing twice during the block. "Ultraman Tiga" is one of a team of peacekeepers who keeps the Earth safe from evil creatures. "Kirby," based on the popular Nintendo video game character, is about a pink, round creature that has the ability to mimic its opponent's abilities. "Kinnikuman" is an entertaining story about space-age wrestlers.

**NEW LOOK** Former dot-com comic company ego[illegible]MANGA (**www.egomanga.com**) has transformed itself from an ebusiness site an integrated media company. ego[illegible]MANGA ENGLISH COMICS is a line of graphic novels published in TPB and ebook form, while ego[illegible]MANGA ANIME MIX is a weekly cable TV show in San Francisco that airs anime-themed music videos with today's music.

**ROBOTOON** Cartoon Network is in negotiations to debut a brand-new Transformers TV series this fall. The program is said to be based on Dreamwave Productions' Transformers: Armada comic, which itself debuts in July. More on this as information develops. ■ [illegible]



# BOOK of the MONTH!

# RUSE

## ENTER THE CROSSGEN VERSION OF 19TH CENTURY ENGLAND WHERE EVERY TWIST AND TURN LEADS TO A GRAND ADVENTURE WITH SUPER DETECTIVE SIMON ARCHARD

**The book may be called Ruse**, but there's no deception at work here; it's a *hell* of an entertaining read.

Entertainment is the primary agenda when it comes to the interaction between the two main characters. Starring a Victorian-era sleuth named Simon Archard and his beautiful assistant, Emma Bishop, *Ruse* tells a rollicking tale of two adventurers caught up in a series of strange events in the city of Partington, a fictional metropolis modeled after 19th-century London that exists on CrossGen's Earth.

The quarrelsome chemistry kicks off in grand fashion in the first four issue storyarc, as readers meet Simon, a Sherlock Holmesian detective who's become bored with the mundane crimes he's accustomed to solving. Emma, a woman with Sigil-powered omnipotence that she hides from Simon and the world at large, joins him on his adventures while constantly trying to prove that she's a capable partner.

That conflict between the two sleuths—imagine a cross between "Moonlighting" and "Remington Steele" with Victorian costumes—sets up a marvelously dynamic relationship. Simon's a no-nonsense man of reason with a biting dry wit. Emma's more than his equal but is treated like a common lackey. Thanks to their gibing interplay, *Ruse* serves up some of the snappiest banter you're likely to read in comics.

"I think one of the reasons people like the book is that it's funny and fun to read," relates series writer Mark Waid. "It's like one of my favorite movies of all time, 'Double Indemnity.' That dialogue is just electric, really fun to listen to. I try to do the same in *Ruse*."

*But Ruse* isn't just fun to read; it's also great to look at, thanks to penciler Butch Guice and the rest of the art team. Inspired by his love of early Sunday comic strips like *Terry & the Pirates*, Guice decided to experiment with the layouts, designing spreads to look and read like a Sunday strip.

"After that first two-page spread in issue #1, I never went back," explains Guice. "I love the 1930s and '40s adventure strips, so I thoroughly enjoy the cliffhanger approach, just one thing after the other."

And aside from Guice's dynamic layouts, there's plenty of saucy eye candy to keep the sex appeal factor high, especially if you've seen the way Guice renders the female form, notably Emma and her nemesis, Miranda Cross.

"I was rather surprised we got so much attention on them, considering how much is hidden behind the Victorian dresses," laughs Guice. "There are a lot of fans who enjoy these ladies, though. I think it has more to do with the personality and the characteristics invested in them. I get to do a lot of stuff with facial expressions and body language which I get into."

Getting readers into the series wasn't hard, thanks to the first mystery-laden storyarc. Simon and Emma's humdrum routine takes a sharp detour when the enigmatic Cross visits Partington. Wielding the same type of mystical power as Emma, Cross enslaves the

WAS THIS A TEST? HOW DID I DO?
AS WELL AS I COULD BE EXPECTED TO, PRAISE
WAIT! DON'T SPEAK FOR A MOMENT. I WISH TO BASK IN THE WARM GLOW OF YOUR PRAISE

**WHAT POWER?** Thanks to Simon and Emma's antagonistic rapport, romantic tension doesn't seem to be a problem.

minds of Partington's top citizens as a first step toward world domination. It's this kind of devious dilemma—and the presence of a true criminal mastermind—which invigorates Simon's spirit, driving him to embark on this daunting case.

"*Ruse* certainly started out as a detective story and there will certainly always be those elements in it," notes Waid. "But to be honest, the further we get into it, it's a lot of fun playing with the grand, bizarre adventure stuff. I love this whole feeling of 'anything can happen.'"

In the current arc, Emma and Simon are hunting Simon's former assistant, the mysterious Lightbourne, who turned up in issue #6 trying to kill his ex-employer in a Houdini-like water trap. From there, Simon and Emma embark on a worldwide trip, a journey that takes them to the village of Telestroud, which may or may not be home to a clan of vampires.

As for Lightbourne, expect him to be a constant thorn in Simon's side, even when he's not the main villain of the story.

"I hate to use the M-word, but Lightbourne is very much the Moriarty to Simon," explains Waid, making reference to the classic Sherlock Holmes enemy, Professor Moriarty. "We will do the complete story behind Lightbourne and Simon and what happened between them. The Sigil plays an important part in that."

That's not to say Lightbourne will be the only bad guy vexing Simon and Emma. In issue #11, readers will meet the Consortium of Greed Manservants, "a supervillain team made up of every butler Simon's ever put away," quips Waid. And don't be surprised to see the return of Miranda Cross "sometime around the end of Year One," hints the scribe.

As for the surprising fan reaction and sales numbers *Ruse* continues to generate, Waid's left scratching his head. "When someone said write a detective story set in Victorian England, I thought, 'Well, this'll be fun, but no one will read it,'" he laughs. "Maybe some readers have had enough of superheroes for awhile. ■ **ANDY SERWIN**

# bookmarks

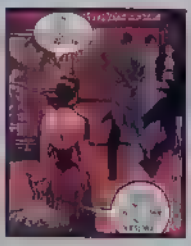
MORE REASONS TO READ THIS BOOK

## WATCHING THE DETECTIVE

**Columbo, Remington Steele, Magnum, P.I.—these chumps have nothing on Simon Archard.**

**Even though Simon works as a detective in CrossGen's *Ruse*, the overall theme of the book is more of a grand, globetrotting adventure. However, Simon still finds time to nab the occasional thief or murderer. Here's a look at some of Simon Archard's greatest detecting feats.**

**FIRST IMPRESSION** On the first page of *Ruse* #1, the Partington police come to beg for Simon's help searching for the murderer of businessman Charles X. Victor. After glancing at some mundane items—a snow shoe, a bellows, a battered piece of bread—Simon turns to the room full of suspects and picks out the guilty party: Victor's partner, Edmund Marchand (although it's never explained exactly how Simon knew)!



**THE BUTLER DID IT** Just seconds after making his arrival at a grand society function, Archard nabs the butler for stealing from the coats of the partygoers and passing the valuables to his partner outside. Fisticuffs fail to ensue; Simon simply trips the luckless crook, foiling the scheme. (*Ruse* #1)

**DEAD END?** When the death of one of Simon's operatives gets labeled an accident, the sleuth throws maggots into his grave at his funeral. When he retrieves them later, he discovers that the man was actually poisoned, ruling out the accidental death! (*Ruse* #3)

**THE MAGIC MAN** While trying to prove the magician Corradino is actually his former assistant-turned-evil mastermind Lightbourne, Simon dons a straitjacket and locks himself into a Houdini-like water trap to imitate the supposed Corradino's methods. Don't worry; Simon escapes and proves his point in the process! (*Ruse* #6)

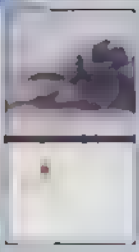
**ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN** Even when he's not on the case, Simon manages to foil a murder—his own! While on the train to Telestroud tracking Lightbourne, Simon's the target of an assassination by an old man with a poisoned blow dart. But Simon foils the murder attempt when he accidentally conks the codger on the head with Emma's cosmetics case, causing the assassin to swallow his own dart! (*Ruse* #7) ■ **AS**

# SECRET STASH

comics' hidden gems

## 30 DAYS OF NIGHT

### WHEN VAMPIRES INVADE A SMALL ALASKA TOWN. CAN TWO POLICE OFFICERS STOP THE IMPENDING BLOODBATH?



**THE DIRT** In the town of Barrow, Alaska, the winter lasts year-round, the sun sets for a month and alcohol is illegal. Not much to do—unless you're a vampire. So when a legion of them show up in *30 Days of Night*, it's up to Sheriff Eben Oleman and his wife/deputy Stella to stop them. Can the town's only two law enforcement officers stop an army of bloodsuckers?

**DOYA LIKE?** Series writer Steve Niles, who fans may recognize from runs on Image's *Hellspawn* and *Freaks*, sums it up best: "It's John Carpenter's 'The Thing' ...only with vampires."

**DIDJA KNOW?** Inspiration comes from everywhere when you're a comic writer. For Niles, it came from a small blurb in a newspaper. "I saw this little newspaper article about a town called Barrow, Alaska that goes under 51 days of total darkness," explains Niles. "So I started thinking if a vampire read this article, they would probably think, 'Wow, we could have ourselves a little vacation.'"

***The worst vacation spot in the world?*** It's not the Middle East, Riker's Island Prison or the Mississippi backwoods. It's the sleepy town of Barrow, Alaska.

After reading Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith's *30 Days of Night* from Idea + Design Works, it's clear that there's not much going for the northernmost neighborhood in North America. Once the sun sets on November 17, it doesn't rise again for over two months. As you might guess, the temperatures in Barrow range from bitter cold to absolutely flippin' freezing. Add in that—horror of all horrors—alcohol is illegal in the snow-covered community. It's safe to assume you won't catch me booking a flight to Barrow anytime soon. Yup, you'd have to

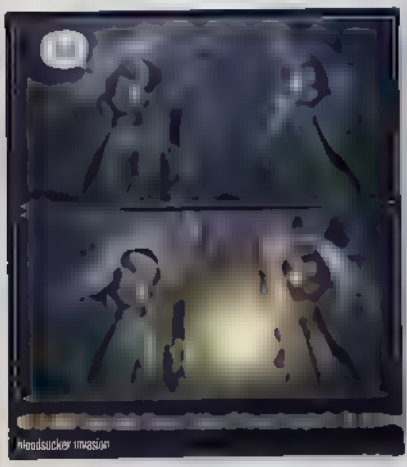
Vampires prepares to feast...

### Crazy like a vampire

That's exactly who's attracted to Barrow like a "Girls Gone Wild" camera crew to Bourbon Street. But it's not just one vampire, but a legion of 'em, ready to feed on the thick blood of the townsfolk. The only thing standing between Barrow and the coming onslaught are Sheriff Eben Oleman and his wife/deputy, Stella.

"They're native Eskimos, very much in love and they enjoy their work," explains series writer Niles. "They're sheriff and deputy in a town where the worst thing to deal with is illegal alcohol, so they're completely unprepared for something like this. The vampire attack happens so quickly that they have to rely solely on their wits."

I made the mistake of reading issue #1 to cure insomnia late one night, but rather than lulling me to dreamland, it had me flinching at noises made by the wind. Niles, who's no stranger to horror thanks to stints on Image's *Hellspawn*



bloodsucker invasion

and adaptations of works by horror masters Clive Barker and Harlan Ellison, spins a terrifying tale with scenes that'll make your skin crawl. His ever-arrogant vampires are truly spine-chilling, like when a vampire tells the two police officers that his brethren will, "pick you off and strip the meat from your bones ...you are [illegible]."

However, Niles also excels at writing the loving and realistic relationship between Eben and Stella. As they watch the last sunset for months, Eben plays the typical guy role trying to squirm out of his wife's embrace. Stella responds, "You ever want to have sex again?"

Meanwhile, Australian painter Templesmith matches Niles' foreboding tale with dark images and the freakiest-looking vampires seen since "Nosferatu." In the cliffhanger of the first issue, Sheriff Oleman peers through his binoculars at a glow on the horizon, and realizes that a family of rabid vampires is staring back at him—from a distance of a few miles. It gives me chills just thinking about it.

In upcoming issues, Niles promises to get right to the action.

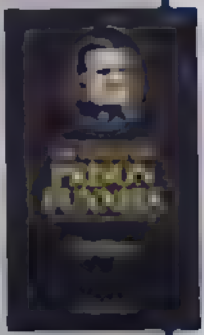
"In the second issue [out in July], I do a time jump and get right to the carnage," hints Niles. "Everybody's trapped and the situation is as bad as it can possibly be. Different factions of vampires start to show up, and it just gets ugly."

Above all else, *30 Days of Night* reads like a horror movie—a *great* horror movie. If you thirst for something that's guaranteed to scare the pants off you, you've gotta pick this series up. But take my advice—read it with the lights on.

**THE LAST WORD** Niles and Templesmith give a whole new reason to be afraid of the dark (and small towns for that matter) with *30 Days of Night*. Brooding vampires, isolated paranoia, incredible art—this series has it all.

# HIDE & SEEK

**If you like *30 Days of Night*, then be sure to give these books a shot, too. All items shipping in July unless otherwise noted.**



**PRISON BREAK** There's absolutely nothing funnier than prison. Okay, maybe not, but after reading Chip Zdarsky's *The Collected Prison Funnies*, you may never again look at a stint in the pen the same way.

Zdarsky claims he was inspired to write and draw *Prison Funnies* after serving a month sentence in a Canadian prison (gasp!) for "a harmless prank played on an ex-girlfriend when I accosted her while wearing a ski mask." While what Chip says may not necessarily be true (I think), one thing's for certain, *Prison Funnies* is hilarious. Whether it's Johnny Arson (a skinless arsonist) singing a happy tune on his guitar, or the countless, un-PC stabs at prison life, you can bet that Zdarsky's one sick fella. A comedy genius, but sick. I love it.

To order a copy, collect $3.95 and visit www.slavehardlaborpress.

**I DARE YA!** You've gotta pick up the second volume of *Triple Dare* from Alternative Comics. It features three 10-page stories by alternative staples James Kochalka, Tom Hart and Nick Bertozzi. $2.95. Visit www.indyworld.com for more info.

**MORSE MORSELS** Who's the hottest indie creator in comics? Apparently this month it's Scott Morse, in addition to trades of *Magic Pickle* (Oni Press) and *Ancient Jew* (Dark Horse) being released, Morse also makes his debut at Marvel on the *Elektra, Glimpse and Echo* mini-series. Visit www.marvel.com, www.onipress.com and www.darkhorsecomics.com for more info.

**BE NATURAL** Let your chums know you're thinking about them by sending them an R. Crumb postcard. Denis Kitchen Publishing offers up the *Mr. Natural Postcard Book*, containing 24 postcards starring Crumb's misunderstood mascot Mr. Natural, who offers a look into his mind as well as commentary on the modern world. Visit www.denniskitchen.com. $11.95.

**A GENERIC WRITE-UP** Hey, you! You, read about the series in *Wizard* #121, now go out and buy the *Generic Trade Paperback* (collecting the first five issues of *Generic Comic Book*) for $8.95. It laughs at the world of superheroes and comics in general AND it'll make you crack up! Visit www.comicsconspiracy.com for more info.

# LATE BOOKS UNLAWFUL?

## Marvel hit with class action lawsuit

Has Marvel shipped more than $8.2 million worth of late books during a recent eight-month period? One retailer said yes, and he's determined to do something about it.

When books ship late, they run the risk of readers losing interest and sales decreasing. If a publisher doesn't accept returns, retailers are left with stockpiled, unsold wares.

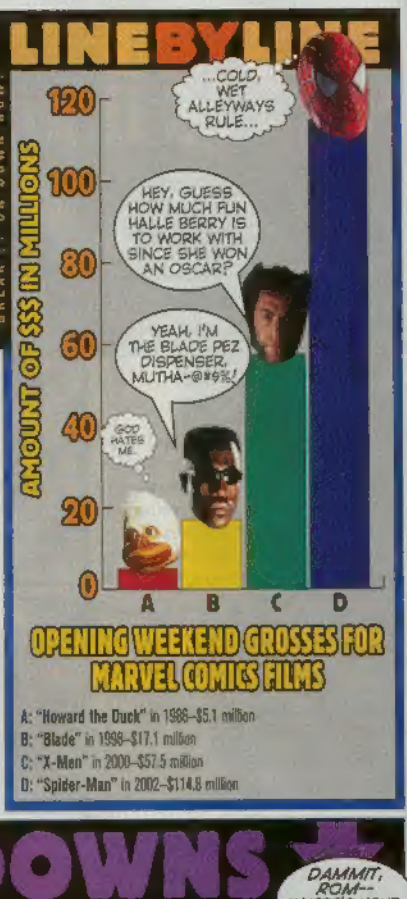
Brian Hibbs, owner of Comix Experience in San Francisco, filed a class action lawsuit in New York on May 6, alleging that Marvel wasn't abiding by its contractual agreement with Diamond Distribution and retailers nationwide. Under the terms of sale, retailers were allowed to return books that shipped more than 30 days late, but Hibbs claims Marvel refused to code such books as returnable.

"Their contract says in black-and-white terms that those [late] books are returnable, but they're not," said Hibbs. "It's a breach of contract."

Reportedly, Marvel recently amended its terms of sale policy to disallow such returns, but Hibbs' lawsuit covers the past two years when the earlier contract was in place.

By filing the lawsuit, Hibbs is in effect suing Marvel on behalf of all 3,500+ American comic retailers. The New York Supreme Court will determine if the suit has merit as a class action. If not, Hibbs as an individual could still sue.

In a statement, Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada said in part, "I'm not going to argue the legal merits of Brian's lawsuit since it is a subject for our legal department. What I can talk about is the sad and unfortunate timing in which Brian decided, better yet calculated, to submit his lawsuit." Hibbs announced his lawsuit the Monday after "Spider-Man" was released. ■ SA




# UPS & DOWNS

I CAN DO THE MASH PA-TATA...

DAMMIT, ROM-- WHERE'S YOUR DIGNITY?!

**SPIDER-MAN** Not only has the "Spider-Man" flick broken several box office records, but Spidey has four books in this month's top 10 and has made the cover of *TIME* magazine! Spidey mania has also been especially kind to back issue sales, as fans desperately search for copies of *Amazing* and *Peter Parker* to complete their collections. Even the issues prior to the J. Michael Straczynski and Paul Jenkins runs have become highly sought-after, namely *Peter Parker* #29 with its "movie-ish" cover.

**BIRDS OF PREY** Thanks to heavy exposure from the "Bruce Wayne: Murderer?" and "Bruce Wayne: Fugitive" storylines, the lovely ladies of *Birds of Prey* are currently enjoying unprecedented sales success. Plus, the "Birds of Prey" TV show has been picked up to air this September on the WB!, so expect their profile to continue to fly high.

**BARGAIN BINS** Old *Transformers*, *G.I. Joe* and *ThunderCats* issues were all bargain bin fodder just a year or two ago, but thanks to the unstoppable force that is '80s mania, just look at their prices now! Don't be afraid to scoop up copies of *Rom*, *Sectaurs* or even *Muppet Babies*: you never know what seemingly lame book could turn into '80s gold! Well, probably not *Muppet Babies*...

**LIBERTY MEADOWS** Fans can't get enough Frank Cho's creator-owned strip-turned-series as issues #2–#10 all take a bump up in price this month. The combination of sophomoric humor, funny animal characters (including Cho himself as a monkey!) and one VERY hot animal psychologist has readers scurrying to complete their collections.

**GREEN LANTERN** GL's 150th anniversary issue made a substantial leap up the charts this month, climbing a whopping 18 slots! Longtime fans rejoiced as Kyle Rayner used the power of his newly modified ring to create a host of future Guardians of the Universe.

**BOOKS WITH "MARVEL" IN THEIR TITLE** *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up* is no more, and *Captain Marvel*, *Marvel Mangaverse* and *Marvel Knights* are all struggling. Hopefully, *Captain Marvel* will reverse this "Marvel" curse when it relaunches later this year with a new #1, as writer Peter David competes with Marvel COO Bill Jemas' own *Marville* in a fan-decided "Best Storytelling" competition.

ROM

GREEN LANTERN

HOTTEST BACK ISSUES

# HOT 10 comics

***Wizard*, by staying in touch with hundreds of retailers throughout the country, keeps a close eye on the hottest back issues. These are the books ringing the registers this month...**

## 1 TRANSFORMERS #1 (HOLOFOIL COVER)

**WRITER:** Chris Sarracini
**ARTISTS:** Pat Lee & Rob Armstrong

Lately it seems like everyone just can't get enough of these Robots in Disguise, and for the second month in a row, *Transformers: Generation One* #1 tops the prestigious "Hot 10" list. However, when Dreamwave released this nigh-impossible-to-find, super-cool holofoil variant (only 25,000 copies were printed), the collector floodgates were opened, causing an immediate sell-out and driving up the price to $100. If you can find a copy, it's definitely worth the investment. **LAST MONTH:** 1

## 2 THE ULTIMATES #2

**WRITER:** Mark Millar
**ARTISTS:** Bryan Hitch & Andrew Currie

It looks like we have another case of the "terrible twos" on our hands here. Yes indeed, it seems as though retailers ordered the holy heck out of *Ultimates* #1, but made the mistake of holding back when ordering issue #2. Hence, the back market collecting frenzy has begun, as reports have trickled in about this issue going for more than $5 a pop in some areas. There are definitely no signs of the Ultimate line slowing down anytime soon. **LAST MONTH:** N.R. **(NOT RATED)**

## 3 INCREDIBLE HULK #24

**WRITER:** Bruce Jones
**ARTISTS:** John Romita Jr. & Tom Palmer

Don't let the drop from last month fool ya; Jones and Romita Jr.'s run on *Incredible Hulk* continues to be one of the hottest tickets in town, and this, the issue where it all began, continues to be a back market scorcher. Be sure to hop aboard the big green freight train while you still can. **LAST MONTH:** 2

## 4 CAGE #1

**WRITER:** Brian Azzarello
**ARTIST:** Richard Corben

Lately it appears like it just wouldn't be a "Hot 10" list without a representative from Marvel's MAX line, and *Cage* just so happens to be a title that definitely *represents*. Not only are fans and collectors converging on Azzarello and Corben's ghetto-fabulous tale, but *Cage* has become quite the commodity, with a current price tag of $5. **LAST MONTH:** 6

## 5 HAWKMAN #1

**WRITERS:** Geoff Johns & James Robinson
**ARTISTS:** Rags Morales & Michael Bair

Johns and Robinson's TWA (that's "Thanagarian With Attitude" to those lacking knowledge of late '80s hip-hop) is arguably the coolest darn character in the DCU, and with good reason. After all, Johns calls him "Conan with wings," and what's possibly cooler than Hawkman teaching punks a lesson with that mace of his? **LAST MONTH:** 5

## 6 PETER PARKER: SPIDER-MAN #59

**WRITER:** Paul Jenkins
**ARTIST:** Charlie Adlard

Whoa! Hold on just a second! Where did this hidden gem come from? Collectors are starting to pick up this issue of *Peter Parker* based solely on the cover image, which looks an awful lot like a certain scene from a certain summer blockbuster. You ask us though, we don't remember this scene from "The Scorpion King" at all. Oh well... **LAST MONTH:** N.R.

## 7 TMNT #1 (SECOND PRINTING)

**WRITER:** Peter Laird
**ARTISTS:** Jim Lawson & Peter Laird

In case you couldn't tell by *Transformers* at the #1 spot and now *TMNT* holding the #7 spot, '80s mania shows absolutely no signs of cooling off. To further prove this, good luck finding yourself a copy of *TMNT* #1, 'cause they're all but sold out. Currently guiding at $3, don't bet your shell on this book not going up in price. **LAST MONTH:** N.R.

## 8 BATMAN/DEATHBLOW #1

**WRITER:** Brian Azzarello
**ARTISTS:** Lee Bermejo & Tim Bradstreet

It seems like this series has it all--the white-hot writing of Azzarello, the sweet-ass-sweet artwork of Bermejo plus Batman and Deathblow, the baddest mulhas in the DCU and WildStorm U, respectively! Now that it's back-issue gold, it appears that *Batman/Deathblow* has come full circle in a collector's eyes. **LAST MONTH:** N.R.

## 9 CAPTAIN AMERICA #1

**WRITER:** John Ney Rieber
**ARTIST:** John Cassaday

Now *this* is the way Cap should be written--taking on real world problems and teaching terrorists a lesson they won't soon forget. Casual readers and collectors alike are coming around to Cassaday's stirring art and the new gritty direction Cap has taken. Pick this one up now while it's still fetching $4. **LAST MONTH:** N.R.

## 10 BIRDS OF PREY #81

**WRITER:** Chuck Dixon
**ARTISTS:** Rick Leonardi & Jesse Delperdang

Major clues from the "Bruce Wayne: Fugitive" storyarc are given in this particular issue of *Birds of Prey*, and Batman fans flocked to this ish in record numbers. Luckily for collectors, DC released a second printing immediately after the first print sold out. Even with the second print, this still remains the hot "Fugitive" back issue. **LAST MONTH:** 7

# C.B.I.Q.

## THE COMIC BOOK INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT

**She's to comics what Heather Locklear is to Melrose Place. She's Emma Frost, a.k.a. the White Queen and possibly the most controversial X-Men member ever. Why? Put yourself in her shoes and see if you can guess how the #1 super-bitch in comics got out of these sticky situations...**

**1.** How do you use your telepathic powers when panicky reporters on the verge of becoming a mob surround the X-Mansion and want mutant blood?

**2.** The proper response when someone smashes your nose, ruining $20,000 worth of delicate plastic surgery is...?

**3.** What caused Emma's timely return to the X-Mansion and gave her the opportunity to snap Cassandra Nova's neck?

**4.** What telepathic philosophy was the White Queen teaching in Genosha before the Sentinels wiped everyone out? And bonus credit for naming the subject of their psychic scans!

**5.** When Ms. Frost gained her new diamond-like strength and invulnerability, what store did she want to rush off to and why?

**6.** Seducing married teammates: good or bad?

**ANSWERS:** [1] Stimulate the pleasure centers of the brains, giving them all orgasms. (*New X-Men* #116) [2] Hang the bastard out the window of a 50-story high rise. (*New X-Men* #128) [3] She had forgotten her Louis Vuitton handbag. (*New X-Men* #118) [4] The entertainment value of hooking into the minds of Hollywood's top actors who thinks A gold star to the first student who discovers the awful truth about Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman! (*New X-Men* #115) [5] Van Cleef and Arpels on Fifth Ave. and 57th Street in Manhattan, a two for, she-she jewelry store to get herself upgraded. (*New X-Men* #116) [6] Ooh-ya on the on. Did she really and Cyclops??? (*New X-Men Annual 2001*)



# MORT OF THE MONTH

## GUESS THE NAME & ORIGIN OF THIS MONTH'S LOSER

**A.** At an early age, Igor Kastakovitch was subjected to terrible atomic experiments by the Soviet government, a process that transformed Kastakovitch into the super-intelligent but physically deformed freak called **THE GREMLIN!**

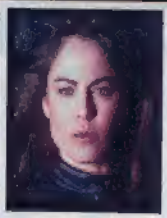
**B.** Tath Ki lived a peaceful existence on the planet Bor in a far-away galaxy, until a powerful galactic force granted Tath undreamed of omnipotence, which he now uses to roam the galaxy and spread wisdom as the awesome **CONTEMPLATOR!**

**C.** Exposed to the Terrigen mist as a young boy, Grom Tharok underwent a bizarre mutation that gave him immense strength and powerful psychic powers, but turned him into the grotesque Inhuman called **THE TROLL!**

**D.** Peter Quinn was born a mutant, and at a young age, he developed special sight powers, including telescopic vision and powerful eye beams that he uses as the mutant mercenary named **PEEPER!**

**MORTOMETER**

# THE HOT SEAT



## This Month Featuring:

# YANCY BUTLER

**STAR OF THE TNT SERIES "WITCHBLADE"**

*WIZARD:* So, now that you've got a hit show with "Witchblade," you must get some pretty freaky interaction with fans of the show and the comic, right?

I get that all the time. It's great. I remember one guy said, "You're my favorite actress!" I was like, "What?" You get all kinds of stuff.

What about accidents on set? I heard you do most of your own stunts.

Yeah, I do a lot of my own stunts, but the only time I've really been hurt was when I busted my toe and that was just from running down the street.

That's kind of lame; got anything better? Maybe some bloodshed?

[*Long pause*] I banged my head once, too.

Okay, then. Let's move on. What was it like to have The Who's Roger Daltrey on the show last season? You really kicked his ass...

[*Laughs*] For that fight scene, we were suspended in harnesses and fighting in front of a green screen. We had some mechanical problems and I almost cut his head off.

Now *that* would've been cool...

No, that would have been bad. Who ever thought I'd be fighting Roger Daltrey though?

But hanging out with rock stars is cool...

It's all too familiar. My dad's in the [pop group] **Lovin' Spoonful**.

I believe in magic...oooo...ooooo...

That's it.

Were there famous people hanging out at your place growing up?

John Lennon and Yoko Ono actually bought a bunch of our furniture when we moved. I think Yoko still has a bed my dad made.

So what's in your CD player right now?

I listen to everything, Van Morrison and Vivaldi, **Nelly Furtado**, all kinds of stuff...Creed!

If you make it to season three, do you think they'll buy you the other glove?

[*Laughs*] If I got two I wouldn't have the Michael Jackson look.

But would I be twice as powerful?

I think not.

Too bad.

If you could have one superpower what would it be?

Uh...I'd like to communicate with people through my head.

Like telepathy?

Exactly.

What superheroes did you like growing up?

I was a huge Wonder Woman fan.

Think you could take Lynda Carter in a brawl?

Oh, I don't know. She's got two bracelets and I've only got one glove. I'd pay money to see it.

Me too! [*Giggles*]

Oh, I used to love Catwoman, too. She was my favorite. I always played her at school. I used to beat up people to play her. I loved her claws...[actress] Eartha Kitt was the best.

What kind of nicknames did you have growing up?

[*Groans*] Do we have to talk about those?

It'll be like therapy, only cheaper.

Uh...Fancy Yancy, Yancy Butter. That's all I'll give you. Oh, and **Butt-head**.

■ MIKE COTTON